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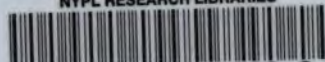
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THE KINGDOM



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"The Kingdom . . . is within you"



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PART I

A RETROSPECT

“Quicumque enim Spiritu Dei aguntur, ei sunt filii Dei.”



THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER I

THE CONVENT OF SAN DAMIANO

I

THE small Franciscan convent of San Damiano near Assisi lay bathed in peace and April sunlight. Above, the terraced fields on the slopes gleamed bright with bladed wheat beneath the dull grey olives, up to the brown and purple steeps where rose the strong curves of the barren mountain; below, the luxuriant gardens of the glens were rich with blossomed fruit-trees, beans in flower and garlands of the budding vines, down to the broad lap of the fertile plain, which, with its bounding, billowy hills, shimmered in faint blue haze.

Beside the steep road that leads down to the convent from the towered mediæval city, a crew of ragged barefoot children played, on the watch for foreign visitors with half-pennies to spare. In a garden above them a peasant girl, in a red bodice, was hanging out wet clothes on a line, extended from tree to tree, and shouting strident snatches of immemorial song. Her short blue skirts, hitched up round her hips, revealed her bare brown feet and ankles, as, having

emptied her basket and set it on her head, she walked along a narrow path between the terraced corn.

Approaching the road, she saw an old man leisurely descending from the town. He was dressed in worn grey clothes, too heavy for the season, with a peaked official cap on his grizzled head, while a black leather bag, adorned with the royal arms, hung by a strap from his shoulder.

"O Gianni! O Gianni the Runner!" she cried. "Good-morning to you, Gianni! What are you doing down here to-day? We don't often see you in these parts."

The old fellow stopped and looked round for the girl. "Good-morning, Carmela," he answered, when he caught sight of her face between the boughs. "It is a telegram for the convent yonder that I am bringing; but it's true that I don't get my feet on the blessed fields every day."

So saying, he sat down on a bank by the road, gazed up at the deep blue sky between the slender silvery leaves, and, extracting a long black cigar from his waistcoat pocket, carefully bisected it with a pen-knife; having replaced the longer part, he ignited the other with a sulphur match. He leaned back luxuriously among the charlock, buttercups and poppies; in a few moments he fell asleep.

The girl proceeded to a neighbouring tank, where she could be heard singing lustily and slapping the wet clothes to the rhythm of her song. A bee hummed over the open mouth of the old man asleep, a lizard peeped at him from the terrace wall above, a party of foreigners passed down to the convent followed by

the children begging and trying to foist upon them little bunches of wild flowers; but Gianni "the Runner" slept. He was called "the Runner" because he carried the telegrams. Everyone in Assisi is known by an ironical nickname.

Presently, however, Carmela returned with a fresh basket-load of wet garments. Pausing by "the Runner," she stopped and shook him. "And what about your telegram for the fathers down yonder?" she asked.

"Thank you, my dear," said the old man yawning. "The telegram? Of course, you are right! But what should the *frati* want with a telegram? What modernists!" he cried.

He rose to his feet, chuckling at his little joke, stretched and proceeded on his way. Passing the painted shrine at the corner of the convent wall, he reverently lifted his peaked cap. He entered the convent gate, crossed the grass-grown cobbled court-yard and pulled the string attached to a small bell overhead.

For a few minutes he stood in the shadow of the little cloister in front of the convent, listening. A blackcap twittered in a cypress; a grasshopper chirruped on a wall; at length old Gianni spat and rang again more lustily.

This time he heard sandalled feet approaching, and the door opened to show a tall, genial figure in a brown Franciscan habit.

"Oh, good-morning, Giovanni," said Brother Cristoforo, shaking the old man by the hand. "Tell me, what can I do for you?"

"A telegram for Father Bernardo Serafini."

"A telegram? No, not really? Madonna mia!" exclaimed the lay-brother, examining the type-written address on the blue folded paper. "Father Filippo, it's a telegram for Father Bernardo," he cried.

A small stout friar with bright black eyes and large round spectacles joined him. "A telegram? For Bernardo?" he said excitedly. "Give it to me! He is in his cell. I will take it to him at once!"

He bustled round the little cloister, up the steep, narrow stairs and along the white-washed corridors between the cells. "I hope there is no bad news in it," he said to himself, panting with the joy of curiosity.

II

Father Bernardo was at work in his cell, writing his history of the first years of the Order. He was a tall thin man of about thirty years of age, albeit he looked older. His face was grave and pale, with a prominent, aquiline nose, a pointed chin, a thin sad mouth, dark eyebrows, and fine sombre eyes, fringed with long lashes, ardent and deepset beneath a broad low forehead and a ring of soft brown hair.

As he read the telegram, he rose abruptly to his feet, his eyes brightening and a spot of colour glowing on his cheeks.

"The dear friend of my youth, Orlando Berardesca, is coming to Assisi to see me. He arrives at four o'clock this very afternoon."

Filippo was delighted. "That is good news," he cried. "He will just come in time for the festival

to-morrow. Did you invite him especially for that?"

"I had not the least idea that he would come at all," Bernardo answered, caressing the telegram with his long fingers.

His heart was beating with suppressed excitement as the memories of his youth crowded into his mind. He had not seen Orlando since he had broken with his old life on entering the Order more than seven years before.

Owing to Filippo's love of gossip the whole community had been informed of the purport of the telegram when they sat down to dinner in the small refectory. Bernardo was naturally so reticent that his companions had long suffered curiosity regarding his former life in the world. They knew little more than that his family was Milanese, well-born and comparatively wealthy, and that he had entered the Order at a later age than most of them had done. They felt a great respect for his learning and refinement, deepening into love and reverence among those who knew him best.

At the hour of recreation after Vespers several of the fathers gathered round him in the garden, a pleasant terraced piece of ground planted with vegetables, fruit-trees, figs, cypresses and pergolas of vine.

"Would your friend care for a room in the convent hostel?" asked Father Girolamo. "It would save him a great deal of expense at the hotel."

"Oh, thank you, I do not think we need trouble about that. You see, he must be really rich since he has been so successful in his career. He can only

spare two nights, so perhaps the hotel would be the more convenient."

"What is his career? Is he a writer?" eagerly enquired Father Domenico, who was the author of several sketches and short stories, and hoped to find someone to whom he might show these works.

"He is a famous singer, an opera singer," answered Bernardo, whereupon Domenico slightly raised his eyebrows and looked away across the fields without reply. Father Tomaso, a fat, rubicund friar, glanced at Domenico quickly, cleared his throat and spat into his large blue cotton handkerchief.


"But there are good men and good Catholics too in that profession," well-meaning Filippo told them, to modify their tacit disapproval.

"As he is doubtless both and a good singer as well," interposed Girolamo, "could he not assist us with the new mass to-morrow?"

"Oh, impossible, impossible!" muttered Domenico, moving with Tomaso away from the group.

"But at least he will sing to us?" went on Girolamo eagerly. There was nothing in the world he loved as he loved music, albeit he loved everything in the world. The only occasion on which he was known to be discontented was when a travelling operatic company passed through Assisi and he knew that his habit precluded him from hearing its performance.

"Perhaps he will, if you ask him," replied Bernardo smiling and wondering if anyone could ever refuse Girolamo anything. In appearance he was fresh and comely, with pink cheeks and bright blue eyes that looked up with a twinkle almost archly. In



manner he was utterly simple and charming, with a happy confidence and directness that disarmed. His was a spirit without care or guile, doubts or deep thoughts on any matter, an irrepressible optimist, a true "jongleur of God," knight errant of the common paths of life, for whom every unexpected hardship was a *geste* of faith and the simplest episode a high adventure.

"Certainly, I shall ask him," he answered, "and of course he will sing. How glad I am we did not sell the novices' piano after all!"

In his eagerness to see his friend, Bernardo started for the station an hour before the time. Hastening down the stony track between may hedges in full flower, over which he could see undulating vineyards, blossoming orchards and the bright green of young corn, his heart was filled with the memory of his friendship and the part it had played in his youthful life. He pictured Orlando's handsome face and boyish charm, recalling their long walks together and their interminable discussions. He thought of his cousin Vittoria, whom he had loved in the old days, but whom after a long and bitter struggle he had surrendered to his friend. For many dark months she had seemed to stand between them, but now that his passion for her was dead or merged into his love for God, the shadow upon their friendship had passed away, and he could feel that he only loved Orlando all the more because Vittoria loved him. He rejoiced to think of his triumphs as a singer, his popularity, his travels, his knowledge of the world, of books and men. Eagerly he passed down between the fields un-

til he reached the ancient church and convent of Rivo Torto, beside which he emerged upon the high-road leading to "the Angels" and the station.

Suddenly he stopped. At the uprising into consciousness of some prophetic intuition, the current of his joy was changed to fear. He felt an impulse to turn back, to flee to the convent, to close the door of his cell against the world. Orlando must not come; how could he stop him? What possible excuse could he find for refusing to see him now? He stood motionless in the middle of the dusty road in an agony of nervous vacillation.

A peasant, driving past him in a brightly painted mule-cart, stared at the tall ascetic friar, the expression of whose pale set face seemed to indicate that he was ill.

"Would you like me to drive you to the Angels?" he asked kindly.

Bernardo thanked him, answering that he preferred to walk, seeing he had plenty of time before the arrival of the train. The man cracked his whip and drove on; Bernardo continued to reason with himself.

What did he fear? What accounted for this change of mood? It was vaguely connected in his mind with the recollection of Girolamo's absurd suggestion that Orlando should assist in the singing of the new mass. This idea had reinforced the sense of contrast, of the impassable gulf between Orlando's life and his own. Was he afraid of what Orlando would think of his companions and the convent? Or was it not rather that he feared himself, what he himself

should think of them, if ever he should see them with Orlando's eyes?

Half an hour later he stood among the porters as the train from the north rushed in. It drew up; a number of foreign tourists climbed from the carriages with holdalls, bags and cameras; Bernardo heard a great voice call the old name by which he had been known in the world; a stalwart figure ran to meet him and was folded joyously in his embrace.

III

The two friends drove up together to the city in a small open carriage, leading the procession of omnibuses and other vehicles that carried the foreign tourists. Orlando was enraptured with the beauty of the views as they ascended the long slope; Bernardo could see nothing but Orlando. He was so handsome, vigorous and alert both in mind and body, so cordial and affectionate towards himself! At first the friar had been conscious of a slight antagonism, a self-defensive attitude left by his sudden fear and vacillation on the road. But Orlando swept aside the barriers and with the charm of happy egotism poured forth the torrent of his ideas and hopes, ignoring utterly the gulf between them, as though the seven years were seven days. All the small things of which Bernardo had thought to tell him, seemed stale and insignificant, seen in the broad light of Orlando's knowledge of the world, as he spoke of a thousand modern developments, new music, new literature, new artistic schools and new philosophies, and the many famous men

whom he had met. Incidentally he mentioned the careers of schoolfellows and others whom they had both known in the past. Hosts of remembered faces rose before Bernardo with scenes and incidents he had forgotten. Room after room in the house of his memories was unlocked by a phrase or a word; thoughts and discussions were requickened that for seven years he had laid aside.

As the two friends drove or walked together in the quiet, mediæval streets, Bernardo forgot the passing hours, his habit and the convent. Within him had arisen a dead self, Anselmo Serafini, the youth who in bitterness of heart and disappointment had cast aside his heritage, the world of living thought and teeming problems, seven years before.

CHAPTER II

MISTS OF THE PAST

I

THAT night after his meeting with his old friend, Orlando Berardesca, Father Bernardo could not sleep. Hour after hour sitting in his tiny cell he stared into the moonlight, listening half-consciously and dreaming of the past. Everyone else in the convent was asleep, and the only sounds that stirred the midnight stillness rose from the radiant world without. He could hear the clear shrill chirrup of the crickets in the orchard, the deep hoarse croaking of the bullfrogs in the little watery glens, the high monotonous hoot of the small grey owl amid the cypresses, and occasional bursts of bubbling song which a nightingale poured forth above the chorus of the smaller voices.

The cool air, as it drifted in, brought him the breath of the beanfields that adjoin the convent garden, and the freshness of cornland, newly drenched by a passing shower. Sitting at his little table near the window, he could see the soft grey outline of the distant hills above and between the seven cypresses, whose shadowy-fantastic shapes—six tall and straggling, one low and bushy as though broken short—nodded like giant drowsy sentinels before the fitful breeze.

Within the cell the moonlight lay in a bright patch

upon the worn brick floor and gradually slid across the ink-stained table. First at the corner it scaled the rampart of heavy books in ancient leather bindings—copies of mediæval papal bulls and other documents in Latin; soon it reached the pewter inkstand, with its wooden penholders; then a similar round metal case containing sand for blotting; next, on the centre of the board, large quires of foolscap paper covered with small neat writing, first one word and then another becoming legible beyond the sharp edge that divided light and shadow. At last the moon-ray touched the friar's hands as they lay pressed together on the centre of the uppermost unfinished sheet, until the veins were visible under the fine clear skin, and the frayed border of his brown habit showed against the wrist. They were large white hands, with thin tapering fingers, carved as in ivory and strangely quiet; long hands of a tall man; smooth young hands, not framed nor used for manual labour; transparent hands of a scholar and ascetic; sensitive, nervous hands that had often clenched in hours of pain or prayer.

But the radius of the moon-ray travelled no further over the figure; it completed its half-circle in the cell and then faded out before the glimmering of the dawn.

All night long the friar sat in silence, almost motionless, his face a featureless grey blot against the background of the darkness. He had come to one of those crises, when, as it were, for a moment we cease living, and perceive that our world of life and thought is merely the creation of a small part of ourselves, when we recognise that our "Truth," our personal

way of seeing things, of living, acting, thinking, is little more than mental habit, or a half-conscious loyalty to some past decision.

Bernardo was striving now to understand his life, to realise to what extent his present was the true development of that past which, in recent years, he had almost forgotten. He wondered how religion had grown so to rule his mind that all his other natural instincts had been buried. He felt that "Truth" is ultimately for each of us the harmony of those thoughts that our inmost will sustains. How had his truth, or his illusion, come to be?

II

The religious cast of thought had been impressed upon his mind from earliest childhood by the atmosphere pervading his home and the mental characteristics of his father.

If he looked back to his childhood, out of the mist of numberless forgotten days, a few bright scenes emerged with startling clearness, like cities upon distant hills struck by a shaft of light. His first home had been a little villa at the southern end of the Lake of Como. He saw again the gravelled terrace, with its bamboos, oranges, plane-trees and its weeping willow that made a shadowy bower over the sunlit water. He dimly recognised his fair-haired mother sewing placidly upon the garden seat, his father, a tall, spare figure in a black-tailed coat, reading aloud to her from a favourite book, while little Viola, his sister, and himself in his brown holland smock, played beside them

on the gravel, or, idly staring at the slow-sailing wherries, listened and tried to understand. Why did the earliest picture always show them sitting so quiet and subdued? Moments of high delight or childish misery were forgotten, while these tranquil hours survived. Was this memory a composite of many scenes, imprinted deeply by their repetition and now viewed as one?

He remembered so well how his father would hold the book high up with his blue-veined hand and read with his head thrown back and his gold-rimmed glasses poised on the bridge of his nose. It may be the volume was Dante, Ariosto, some verse translation of a foreign classic or some legend of the saints, for love of religious and romantic poetry was the dominant affection of his father's mind, and his almost mediæval temperament was seldom stirred by any book unconsecrated by at least a century of Catholic veneration.

The games that he, Anselmo, played with his sister reflected the tenor of his father's readings. He had often been told in later years of the occasion when he had impersonated St. Anthony, kneeling in his "cave" under the laurel bushes and making poor little Viola in a nightgown take the part of his "temptation," until by vehemence of his six-year-old invective he had frightened her out of "pretending" into tears.

On Sundays and great Saints' days the whole family went to Mass and Benediction in a village church of white plaster and gold ornament. He was always impressed on entering a church by his mother's warning

not to talk and by the solemn look upon his father's face; other people talked and gesticulated, but he was told that they ought to know better. This made him feel that he knew how to behave in church. Genuflexion and crossing himself were little dramatic acts which filled him with a sense of importance. To do on his own account what his father and mother did was playing at being grown up. The lights, incense and vestments gave him exquisite thrills of pleasure. He vaguely caught the sound of the Latin responses from his father's lips and murmured a string of syllables that sounded like them, but signified nothing except that he felt good. Sometimes when he was alone he would solemnly repeat them to himself as though they were a magic incantation.

As he began to understand, certain parts of the services gave him especial delight. Most of all he loved the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, which was sung at Benediction, invoking her intercession under many names. He imagined the Queen of Heaven dressed in blue and white and sitting on a shining throne, which, like the altar, was covered with candles, to receive the petitions as they climbed up in a beautiful allegorical pageant. First came figures difficult to define: the Kyries, the Christe Eleisons and the Misereres. The "Ora pro nobis" formed the real procession. There were the Sanctas in green and gold — why green he never could tell, but it was so — then the Maters in crimson with splendid jewels, rubies and pearls especially, followed by the Virgos in cloth of silver. These formed the first part of the procession. They were the Titles of Quality. The figures were

neither men nor women, but somehow resembled the mediæval *poursuivants* in an old book of heraldry his father had once shown him. Next in the procession came the Titles of Love, a mixed company of gorgeous allegorical personages walking three by three like those before them. There was the Mirror of Justice, a large reproduction of his mother's hand-glass set in gold and jewels. It walked between the seat of Wisdom and the Cause of Our Joy, which could not easily be visualised. There followed the three Vessels or Vases, shaped like the tall stone urns in the garden, but made of beaten gold and silver. Next came the Mystic Rose, with petals of great rubies, moving between the Towers, one ivory and the other davidica, which he pictured as material like the rock-crystal in his father's geological museum. This was the great moment which sent little shivers up and down his spine. There followed the Golden House, the Ark of the Covenant and the Door of Heaven, whose glory brought perspiration to the palms of his hands. The blazing Morning Star with the Salvation and Refuge, the Consoler and the Help, concluded the second part of the procession. The third part, the Titles of Honour, consisting of the ten Queens, was less interesting to him after such marvels.

Such was the impression made upon his childish mind by the services in church. As for the prayers that he said every night at his mother's knee in his own language, the very familiarity of the phrases, learnt like a parrot, prevented him from thinking of their meaning, long after he would otherwise have been able to understand them. He associated with his

phrases only certain vague but visual shapes. But he always felt very solemn while he said them, so that perhaps God understood his prayer, if he did not.

He still had a dim picture of the snow-white bed and the mist-white room filled with candle-light and whispers, of his mother's knees against which he leaned, and her way of saying: "Hush, God hears everything, but Viola is asleep." Whenever he hesitated or skipped a phrase, she would correct him gravely, and her solemnity made her manner seem severe. In fact, he said his prayers to her, praying in heart to say them right.

Apart from this, the friar had little recollection of his mother. He was not sure that he could recall her face except from her portrait. She was a German, the daughter of a certain Johann Kröner, one of his father's fellow-partners in a well-known firm of ecclesiastical publishers, from which, having married late in life, he had shortly afterwards retired. Almost the only thing the son could remember concerning her was his father's constant declaration after her death that she was a true saint. Beyond this he recalled two traits, her cleverness in making pretty puddings, and her curious accent in saying certain words. One day he laughed at her at table, and asked why his mother did not speak like other people. "Because she is a foreigner," his father answered. "It is very clever of her to speak our language as she does. Besides, you must never forget that since she is, as it were, a guest among us, it behoves us as Italians to be especially courteous to her about this and everything else." That speech had immensely impressed him at

the time; he remembered the awe with which he and Viola had looked at her across the table. Now he only thought how characteristic of his father was the notion that he ought to be especially polite to his mother — on the ground that she was a foreigner.

In his seventh year she died, after five days' illness from pneumonia, caught while returning late from some excursion on the lake. He remembered the coming of a relative, then one frightful time during which his father cried aloud through what seemed endless hours of darkness, while he and Viola in their beds shook all night long with terror. Then came the departure from the villa on a bitter day of rain, when the children first put on their suits of black, and, standing in the Como cemetery, witnessed a dismal terrifying ceremony which they did not understand.

There followed a dreary and bewildering, but almost forgotten, interval of two months with noisy children cousins in a country house near Monza, after which opened a new world in a new home at Milan.

III

This was the home around which circled the most intimate memories of the friar's youth and boyhood. As he pictured it, there surged into his mind confusedly, defiant of chronology, clear random scenes that slowly gathering links of detail grouped themselves into larger companies and fell into their places in the procession of the years. This home was situated on the *piano signorile* of a large seventeenth century palazzo standing in a narrow, winding, cobbled

street called the Via del Lauro, not far from the Scala theatre, like a little quiet backwater between noisy streams of traffic. It consisted of several spacious but gloomy rooms, with a number of strange little "cabinets" and cupboards squeezed in unexpectedly between them—the whole surrounding three sides of a columned court, echoing and cold as a well. In the total lack of sunlight at any hour of the day all the decorative efforts of successive generations had only achieved a dismal parade of chilly, though crowded, discomfort.

The house with its furniture had been taken over from the former inhabitants just as it stood, by his father's two elder sisters, who lived in an apartment overhead. One of these sisters, Aunt Elena, was paralysed, to take charge of whom the younger, Aunt Cecilia, had surrendered her desire for the convent. At the death of Anselmo's mother, the sisters had debated whether their duty impelled them to receive their brother and his children into their own seclusion; whereupon the falling vacant of the floor below them with all necessities provided, appeared to them as a special act of Providence to resolve their state of doubt. Under these circumstances it was not likely that they should be critical either with regard to the lack of sunshine or the style of the decorations.

The rooms, in fact, presented an extraordinary medley of eighteenth century splendour and nineteenth century ugliness. Two of the larger salons were frescoed with curious architectural vistas and landscapes seen through pergolas of vines and marble colonnades. For months after their arrival the children would spend

hours in running to different corners of the rooms, and putting their little heads into all possible attitudes, in order to get different perspectives, until the game made them giddy. The pergola decoration was in the dining-room, with monstrous peacocks and small pigeons sitting on the painted cornice or flitting across blue rifts of ceiling. Some of the landscapes were peopled with men and animals, about whom the children used to tell each other tales.

The other rooms were stencilled with heavy patterns in purple, indigo and brown, the ceilings being all elaborately painted, albeit often stained and cracked, as also were the carpetless floors of imitation marble and mosaic. Heavy arm-chairs and sofas, upholstered in magenta satinet or variegated tapestry, mingled with gilded relics of an older and more sumptuous taste, their glory or shabbiness concealed by dingy calico covers, never taken off. Large mildewed mirrors, the cracks in them painted over with distorted branches of pink roses, dimly reflected vast *armoires* and sideboards of mahogany between marble or mosaic tables, set out with heavy china ornaments and bouquets of waxen flowers under domes of glass, each standing on its separate woolwork mat. On the walls a few dark oil paintings hung between garish oleographs of the Madonna, the reigning Pope, his Cardinal Secretary and his predecessor, together with queer engravings of saints in ecstasy and ghastly martyrdoms. There was also a large collection of dreary daguerreotypes of dull-looking unknown people, presumably relations of the former inhabitants, who seemed to have awakened all at once to the horror of this accumulated ugliness.

ness, and, fleeing away incontinently, to have left it for their successors to endure or to destroy. Anselmo often wondered why his father never swept away this rubbish; perhaps he lacked the energy; perhaps he never noticed it.

The only room to which the friar could look back with pleasure, was the library, for here stood the iron stove that was sometimes lit on winter evenings, and here in their yellow parchment bindings dwelt the three thousand books which had been brought away from Como, almost the only things in their house not at one time belonging to the worthy family of the daguerreotypes.

All day long when his children were at school, what did his father in these chilly twilight rooms? He had no friends, and, for all his reading, he never published a single line. His son saw him now, in fancy, sitting upright in his stiff arm-chair, brooding over his nervous griefs, or pacing up and down the hard cold floors, a very ghost for restless impotence.

IV

But when the children were at home, father and son were each other's dearest comrades. The boy made himself old and thought old thoughts that were reflections of his father's mind. He looked upon his hours at a neighbouring convent-school and his occasional holiday walks as so much matter to talk about. He never could give himself up full-heartedly to the delights of romping with his school-fellows, the sharing of little secrets, the hatching of small plots and

mischievous, which filled so large a part of the other children's worlds. The instinct of play was sicklied over by an inherited shyness, increased by want of playmates in his earliest years. On the other hand, his father shared with him all his curious interests and enthusiasms; he would call him into his library and solemnly read to him long passages from ancient volumes, seeming to consult his opinion even about obscurities of mediæval dogma. The old scholar ignored all difference between his own powers of comprehension and those of a boy of nine or ten. Whenever the little Anselmo by a lucky accident happened to make an observation to the point, the father took it as a proof of the profoundest insight and precocity, and looking at his son gravely over his glasses, would recall it and repeat it for days afterwards, usually at the most unexpected moments.

Among the chief subjects of their study were the mediæval Latin hymns and the various breviaries of the Monastic Orders. His father always grew eloquent upon the superiority of the more ancient hymns over the neo-classical versions of the Renaissance. One day as they were returning from some evening service in the Cathedral through the crowded streets of the city, he stopped in his walk as he always did when particularly struck by any thought.

"Pagan nonsense! Mere confectionery!" he exclaimed, suddenly turning round on the narrow pavement. "Listen to this, my son!" and there and then he began to declaim the old version of some mediæval hymn amid the streams of passers-by, his eyes fixed upon his son with a stern expression, as though he

were scolding him. A small crowd collected round them, staring with no small amusement, till suddenly poor little Viola grew frightened and burst into tears. The father paused in the midst of a verse and started painfully, then picking up the child in his arms strode on through the spectators with head erect, high colour and flashing eyes. It was glorious to recall how the old phrases stirred him.

Among the incidents which remained most vividly impressed on his son's mind was the annual family pilgrimage to Como to visit his mother's grave on the "Day of the Dead." There was always much agitation over plans, and there were infinite crowds in the stations, trains and tramcars. The children carried great armfuls of chrysanthemums, golden, white and purple, while their father hired large black lanterns with gilt crosses on them and brought quantities of tapers to light upon the grave. But all possible pleasure in this labour for the children was obliterated by a frightful image in their minds of the uplifting tombstone in the midnight, and the Dead, dressed in their best black, as though for their own funerals — grey-bearded men and bonneted old ladies — issuing for their ghostly entertainment.

When the solemn decoration was completed, they all knelt down in their black clothes between the tapers, father and son removed their hats and little Viola began to cry. They repeated the "De Profundis" and a few prayers in a low voice, one of the last responses especially adding to the children's terror.

"A portis inferi."

"Erue, Domine, animam ejus!"

"The door of the lower world" signified for them a composite mental picture of all the dark and dismal doors which they had ever seen. When it opened there issued forth flames, smoke and those appalling Dead. There was an ancient disused cellar upon the dark stone staircase of their house which they somehow had associated with this Door. They used to tell one another that they had heard groaning as they passed it and would creep by hand in hand with throbbing hearts. All these terrors surged up at the phrase.

The little service over, their father relapsed into a silent fit of agony, being every instant more and more shaken by emotion, while the children kneeling on either side glanced fearfully up at him and at one another, wondering how long the strife would last.

One year it rained as they knelt thus, and an icy wind, sweeping over the lake, extinguished the unsheltered tapers, to the infinite concern of the shivering children. At length unable to bear it longer, Viola piped shrilly between her sobs:

"Papa! Papa! If all the lights go out, Mamma will not be able to see the flowers!"

But the man neither saw nor heard. When at last he rose from his knees, and, notwithstanding the rain, the myriad lights made a golden galaxy of the whole cemetery in the falling autumn twilight, he strode to the station with an unwonted vigour born of suffering, while the children trotted timidly behind him, not daring to speak until they reached their home.

During all that day and the next their parent hardly broke with a single word the silence of his depression and kissed them good-night in a cold, evasive way.

V

The happiest hours of the children's lives were those when their father took them into his library to tell them tales. This afforded him his keenest pleasure and the chance to give the best of himself to them. Strange stories from the by-paths of history, legends of saints and holy people, puzzling entanglements of mystical doctrine with scraps of mediæval lore or superstition and episodes from old romances made up a wild phantasmagoria of marvel, richer than all the tales of *Shaherazadi*. Their father's mind was like some wonderful Gothic minster, filled with terrific glooms and shafts of painted radiance, with quaint surprises and perplexing inconsistencies, now exasperating by some narrow incompleteness, now enchanting with some vista of unlooked-for grace and charm. There were days when a thick cloud of depression for some unguessed reason would involve his spirit in impenetrable darkness, and the children would go about on tiptoe speaking to each other only in whispers. Then the mood would change as suddenly, and it would seem to be his greatest joy in life to open to them the treasures of his mind.

Viola, who was two years younger than her brother, understood scarcely one-half of what he told them. But she was usually too sleepy, too shy or too contented in her father's love, to ask him to explain. She used to sit on his knee, nestle her dark head against his shoulder, and go to sleep lulled by the rhythmic phrases. But Anselmo, on a little stool before him, would stare with round eyes up into his face, and

draw him on with questions to the disclosure of new marvels.

The boy worshipped his father, and if the religious instinct be related to the filial, it may be that the devotion and reverence that he developed at this shrine were afterwards transmuted by maturer knowledge into the mystic consciousness of a deeper intimacy and a mightier Fatherhood.

VI

There are certain years when in the mind of the solitary child the instinct of fear creates a veritable reign of terror. In infancy the fright is rather of things heard or seen and not understood, later it is the unseen and undefined. Perhaps these alarms are the survival from the twilight age of savage ancestors, when in every shadow lurked a watching peril, and every sound and rustle in the lonely forest started the offspring flying to its home. Were not the night-fear and the dream-fear an agony to those whose primitive weapons against wilder beasts availed them little in the darkness?

Anselmo hardly felt this dread of solitude at Como, playing or sleeping with his sister, and his mother near at call. It was unknown to him amid the racket of his cousins' house. But now that Viola slept with the old servant and he had a room to himself, the darkness and the semi-darkness brought such fears that he began to loathe his bedtime. His father slept in the room next to his, but came to bed only in the small hours of the morning long after the boy was

asleep. The morning meant relief and freedom, the evening dread and the night terror.

When Anselmo was with other people, he was ashamed of these fears; in fact they became inconceivable. They were entirely irrational, like the arising of some sub-conscious instinct into consciousness. A mother might have divined them; but there was no one he could tell. He was not afraid of human or physical enemies; he felt that he would almost have welcomed as a friend the presence of a robber in his room. He was not a coward when he was with others; he was more daring than his school-fellows in their games. But he dreaded the journey from his father's study at bedtime through the deserted rooms, where each familiar object looked unearthly and the shadows danced round the walls and floor at the moving of his candle. When he closed the library door behind him, he thought to see he knew not what of terror. He hated a dim light cast up from the court below or a cupboard door ajar in this house full of cabinets and closets. A sound he could not understand would bring the perspiration to his forehead. He did not know what he was afraid of, but it was something worse than death or physical injury, something that was more awful for being undefined.

He found comfort in his father's stories of the saints who drove away demons by the power of relics and holy names. Every night he put his mass-book underneath his pillow and slept with his rosary round his neck. He put holy water into a metal vase, which he hung with his crucifix and palm above his bed. He whispered prayers as he undressed and crossed him-

self whenever he was startled. He did what he had to do with little rites and ceremonies, for by doing everything in a certain order he felt himself more safe. Occasionally by his repeated prayers he attained to an almost physical sense of a protecting Presence. On the other hand, he usually forgot to say his prayers in the morning.

With what a sense of peace he would awake to find the dawnlight in his room, to see by his watch that he had yet some hours to lie warm and idle, his fears forgotten as a nightmare that is past! So may the ancient forest-dwellers have cowered before malignant spirits till they welcomed with a joyous cry the sun, the shining God and Father. Did they also put their fetishes beside them in the darkness and hide them away ashamed before the growing light?

This phase with Anselmo lasted several years and gradually died away in the awakening of his reason. It was not that he grew to laugh at his terrors because he knew better; he merely forgot them when he went to bed with his mind possessed by some absorbing thought. But that was not until a new Anselmo had arisen with the unfolding of a new and larger world.

VII

For to live is just to make a world, the friar thought, as the memory of his childhood passed before him. Just as the silkworm on its twig winds itself up in its cocoon, so does the soul construct of threads, drawn from its natural instincts, a mental habit in which to dwell,—an inner world of motive values through

which alone the external world is seen. Childhood's environment directs this weaving by restraining or developing the tendencies inborn.

Would his mind have been directed towards the Infinite so early but for his childish fears and loneliness in the unhomely rooms of that strange, ghostly house? Had not his fate, that after twenty years he should sit there, thus, been written in prophetic characters on those dark stencilled walls and painted ceilings?

There was no object that he had daily touched or seen but had added its small stone to the building of this inner world, no thought or legend that his father told him but his soul had seized upon it in the impulse to create.

At length after years of transition into boyhood, new wakening instincts had inspired a reconstruction. But this new world had been little more than a development with similar materials, albeit built upon a larger and more complex plan.

CHAPTER III

THE AWAKENING MIND

I

BERNARDO felt that he had definitely passed out of his childhood at the time of the arrival in Milan of his Monza cousins, the children, that is, of his Uncle Amedeo, his father's youngest brother. Of his cousins, the eldest, Angelo, was about two years older than himself, the second, Pietro, a few months, the girl, Vittoria, being nearly two years younger. These cousins inhabited a large flat in a wide new street leading from the older quarter towards the castle, and thenceforward the five children were sent to a new school together, a great bare building in the outskirts of the city, whither they went and returned in the tram-car carrying their books in goatskin knapsacks.

The noisy gaiety of Angelo and Pietro, both stronger physically than himself and inclined to make a slave of him, only accentuated Anselmo's reticence and prematurely developed his instinctive independence. He realised that their minds were different from his own, that their contempt for his indifference to their pastimes was unjust, since they had not any interest in his; accordingly he determined to take revenge by excelling them in class and in those lines of life where they were weaker than himself. Thus when the in-

stinct of emulation suddenly awoke, it threw its whole force into his intellectual growth. He worked harder than his cousins at his lessons, although he found them easier to do: in his spare time he made inroads upon his father's library, acquiring thence considerable store of curious, ill-assorted knowledge. Unconsciously directed by his father's tastes, he read a great deal of poetry, until he began to talk to himself in the language of Ariosto's knights, while he was dressing in the morning.

Before long he set to imitate the matter which he read. He composed in his spare time, and especially in bed at night, all kinds of ambitious effusions. Chiefly because poetry seemed the most glorious, he aspired to be a poet. As soon as he lay down he would repeat some stanza and industriously puzzle out another like it. Then he relighted his candle softly, scribbled his verse in pencil on a scrap of paper, put out the light and turned round until he had finished another. His father, whose room led out of his, would watch for the crack of light under the door, and having waited till he was sure that his son was finally asleep, would creep in through the darkness, steal the manuscript, gloat over it for a few minutes and then silently put it back under the boy's pillow. When any work was completed, the author always took it to his father, who feigned delight and surprise that he should have found time to write it. Of course, Anselmo knew he came at night, and his father probably knew he knew it, but by a tacit pact they kept up this make-believe for years.

In no dearer attitude could the son now recall this

grave shy man than when holding high the little paper between his trembling fingers, with his head thrown back and his brows knit, as though he weighed a matter of the first importance, he would slowly read over in sonorous tones some limping stanza, pausing to judge with frequent repetitions and much gentle deference to the author's eagerness. The friar still kept some of the old manuscripts, written in a boy's round hand, and scored with scholarly emendations, always inserted lightly in pencil with a diffident question mark. Especially he remembered one fatal little poem, an "Elegy," as he called it, upon his mother's grave. Before he could recognise his mistake, the old man had put down his grey head between his hands and was weeping. Yet the verses, shut with certain sacred letters in a small black leather pocketbook, were carried by his father until his death.

These effusions took a religious tone at the period of Anselmo's preparation for his first communion, a ceremony to which his father attached a very high importance. He had his son especially taught the Catholic dogma by a saintly old priest, Dom Giuseppe Mariani, who came three times a week in the evening to talk to him about religion. The old man would gravely expound some article of the Catechism and all at once break off, as though rapt to contemplation of celestial beauty in the doctrine, till after a long minute of silence he would sigh and bring himself once more to earth with the assistance of a pinch of snuff, and the application to his eyes of a red and yellow cotton handkerchief.

It was perhaps the solemn atmosphere of this special

preparation that first gave the boy a sense of being singled out for some great work by God — a thought that was encouraged by his father's pride in him. But on the great day he was too nervous to be moved by its significance. He detested the dressing up, his black gloves, the white ribbon on his arm; his Monza aunt's concern because his hair would not stay tidy; his Milan aunt's distress because his mind was not at peace; the nervous flurry of his father; the tremulous awe of timid Viola; and the smug piety of Angelo and Pietro. The ceremony was too overwhelming to impress him rightly; it only made him miserably self-conscious.

Yet henceforth some of his richest memories clustered about the shadowy image of the Cathedral. From the clangour of trams, the glare and dust, he passed in an instant into the whispering hush of sombre spaces, an enchanted forest of huge Gothic trees of stone. The boy would go alone or with Viola and his father to gaze at the glowing windows, the vistas of aisle and apse, or the great shining golden crucifix hanging aloft against the shadows of the chancel roof. Here he knelt amid the throng of silent worshippers before the Blessed Sacrament in the rich twilight of innumerable lights, the angel of the Revelation set the seal of mystic vision on his forehead, and his boyish mind received, once and for ever, like a spiritual sense, the perception of an overshadowing Power.

II

It was with this period of his life that Bernardo principally associated the memory of his two secluded

aunts who lived in the flat above, one of whom never left her bed save for her sofa, the other their sunless rooms except for church. At certain intervals Viola and himself used to be taken to their apartment to interview them for a few solemn minutes, to kiss them gently on the forehead, to talk quietly (which signifies that they were too afraid to speak at all), and occasionally to receive a little sweetmeat, a tract, a medal or a sacred picture.

But now after his first communion they treated the boy differently, interviewing him henceforth alone, giving him holy books and expensive objects of devotion and ever cautiously sounding him with regard to his vocation for the religious life.

"It always seems to me that the life of the Benedictine fathers is one of the most beautiful one can imagine," Aunt Elena would say faintly from her sofa, her white face set as for a spiritual conflict.

"Yes," he would answer vaguely, sitting uneasily on the edge of his chair.

"Have you ever studied the Rule of St. Benedict, Anselmo?" Aunt Cecilia would enquire. On the boy's negative she would lift a little pamphlet from the table. "We happen to have a copy; I was reading it last night. Would you not like to have it?"

In his strange conscientious way Anselmo would thank her gravely, but decline it, stammering that he had so much to read just then.

"All the same, I think you had better give it to him, Cecilia," Aunt Elena would murmur, a tiny spot of hectic colour on her thin pale cheeks. Anselmo would put it in his pocket, without, however, promis-

ing to read it. In this way the good women by their tentative timidity probably turned aside his inclination and postponed the fulfilment of their prayers for many years.

Of little more effect upon his development were the various monks and spiritual directors whom they invited him to meet in their cold rooms. On these occasions, by their stiff manners, their exaggerated deference to clerical visitors, their unceasing watchfulness and little patent ruses, they created an atmosphere so painful to the boy that it was impossible he should retain other impressions than of extreme discomfort.

Yet none the less for a time his aunts succeeded in persuading his father that Anselmo wished, if not to enter an Order, at least to become a secular priest. The boy saw from the old man's silence that there was something on his mind, until at length one day he asked him with characteristic suddenness if he wanted to go to a certain well-known seminary. His evident relief when the boy declined showed how much it would have cost him to determine to part with his son, if he thought he had a "vocation." Anselmo announced that he was not going to be a priest, but a great philosopher, in order to reconcile Science with the Church. His father thanked him gravely "for the confidence which he had reposed in him," and taking him there and then to the principal bookseller of the town, bought him a small library of ancient and modern philosophy. Anselmo did not know until years afterwards that his father had given as many of his old rare volumes in exchange.

The old scholar seriously accepted the boy's ideal


and henceforth looked upon it as his son's mission to the world. He was so confident in his heaven-born powers of discriminating Catholic truth from the errors of infidelity that, being ignorant himself of all philosophy, he did not pause to consider whether such writings as those of Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Schopenhauer were not strong meat for a young brain. At the same time his generosity put an unconscious pressure upon the conscientious boy, who thought he must not "waste" the books, but endeavour to repay his father by reading and studying them, whether he always understood or not. Therefore, on all his holidays, and in the evenings after he had finished the preparation of his ordinary schoolwork, he set himself to read and puzzle out so many pages about Natural Selection, Variation from Type, the Nebular Hypothesis, Progress from Homogeneity to Heterogeneity, the Primal Cause, the World as Will and Power, and a thousand similar conceptions.

These studies might not have affected his religious faith had not mention of them to Dom Giuseppe Mariani brought upon him a solemn homily against the reading of infidel books inspired by the Father of Lies, and wisely forbidden to the faithful by the Church. That aroused his opposition in defence of what he felt his old confessor did not understand. Opposition nourished his intellectual pride and made him an atheist at fifteen. He began to worship "Truth" in the temple of "Free Thought," and presently considered it his duty to abstain from the Sacraments and to forego Confession. This loss of faith did not trouble him; his imaginary sacrifice of "superstitions" for

the sake of his new deity only quickened his vanity and his interest in his books. He fancied that they brought him "freedom" he had never known before, that by laying aside all his "illusions" he was rising to the true stature of a man. For a month or two he was in peril of growing into an intellectual prig; his life was altogether so unboyish and unnatural.

It was his father's love that saved him. Anselmo had wished to spare his father the knowledge that he knew would pain him, and was ready with little subterfuges to prevent his finding out that he no longer went to Mass. But as the festivals came round on which they were wont to make their communion together, he noticed that his father found a reason for departing from their custom. For some months Anselmo could not discover what this signified, until one evening as he was cutting the pages of a new philosophic book, the old scholar looked up quietly and said: "Never open a new book, my son, without a prayer that God may enable you to see His light in it." Anselmo flung his arms round his father's neck and they said the prayer together. "My fault, it is all my fault," the old man repeated softly as he kissed him.


From that hour Anselmo read his books from a different point of view. The one problem of interest for him was to verify the existence of a Power that he could worship. His mystic instincts re-awakened and secretly influenced his judgment. For, after all, "Free Thought" is the shallowest of illusions. Thinking is always directed to a preconceived conclusion which stealthily guides its course. The domi-



nant prejudice in some unconscious way sifts and arranges the evidence. Hitherto Anselmo had tacitly applauded the naturalistic writers from pride in his own independence and in the sacrifice that he fancied he was making for the ideals of Truth and Liberty. Henceforth his heart was in the other scale, and where the heart is there will the mind be also. Through all the din of the intellectual struggle between creeds and doubts the mystic instinct kept a little peace around his soul. Anselmo lived so little in the outward and material that he could not long accept the Apparent for the Real; for him there was always something — invisible, unknowable, within, beyond.

He read a few books of Christian apologetics sympathetically, after which it was not long before he went once more to Mass with Viola and his father. But, looking back, the tears welled up into his eyes to think of what insight love had given the old man, and by what little signs he had observed the change in his son's mind, and with what tact, while hiding his grief and taking all the blame, he had saved him either from practising hypocrisy or from making a declaration that would inevitably have bound him to his boyish unbelief.

This little crisis over, the boy's will bent itself more eagerly than ever to his self-determined task, no less than that of studying all the great philosophies and reconciling their doctrine with the Holy Catholic Faith! He gave up composing poetry, deeming that but trifling; some day he meant to write a glorious Latin hymn. Instead, at night he sat up reading, or lay awake discussing an interminable problem with the



ghost of some defunct philosopher. Sometimes in the excitement of these imaginary debates he would rise up from his bed and walk to and fro in his room gesticulating in the darkness and even speaking aloud, till suddenly remembering his father, he would slip back to his hot sheets. How stormily he raved and overcame the atheists!

He listened more carefully to Dom Giuseppe that he might learn from him without asserting contrary opinions. The old man appeared to share his father's admiring affection and to foster the boy's aspirations while marvelling at his intelligence. Under his care Anselmo learned to love the Catholic mystics, and to trace the spiritual stages whereby the chosen soul is gradually invaded and absorbed by God. First is the long climb of purgation, when the first renunciations are effected; secondly, the hilltop of supernatural illumination, when the ray strikes fitfully, bringing with it ineffable heavenly gifts; thirdly, the vale of purging "drought," when the spiritual light is withdrawn and the sensible world deprived of savour, in order that no taste for earth remain; lastly, the mountain peak of "Unity," when the human will being one with the divine, the world is given back, transfigured in the radiance of celestial Love. Besides this, he learned of "natural prayer," of "mental prayer" and the "prayer of quiet," wherein the soul blissfully reposes in its Lord, and awaits the "prayer of union," when sense and thought are done away. He understood the distinctions between "ecstasy" and "rapture," and visions "imaginative" and "intellectual," and all the lore of that transcendent

science which eludes all human definition, yet follows definite and abiding laws. He was interested intellectually in this evidence of God, but strangely enough, he never consciously connected it with any mystic transports of his own. He was taught to look upon the miracles and visions of the saints objectively as parts of the perpetual "Epiphany of the hidden Presence of Christ," and this as the complement of the Sacraments and the doctrine of the Church.

III

During these years Anselmo dwelt in three concentric worlds with three distinctive personalities. The Anselmo that his comrades knew was a good-looking, silent, gentle boy, shy, pliant and undecided, simple and slow in his replies, unable to throw himself with keenness into their interests, hiding his warmth of feeling by a reticence he knew not how to break. Unknown to them was the Anselmo who dwelt between the leaves of books; eagerly devouring, building and destroying; ruthlessly, even arrogantly, judging, approving and rejecting; writing his poems, arguing his theories, dreaming his dreams. But often as he was reading or thinking in his little bedroom, until his candle flickered or went out, walking alone at sunset in quiet places, or kneeling in the dark Cathedral, there would arise a third Anselmo known hardly to the other selves. He dwelt in a silent cloister lit by another Sun, a world within a world, a dream within a dream.

It was always characteristic of the boy to carry his

strongest feelings to God in solitude. He could never fully realise any emotion in the presence of other people. If he were told good news, as for instance, that he had won a prize, he did not let it appear that he was in the least degree elated; he shut up the thought in his heart until he was alone and then his feeling would not be elation so much as thankfulness. It was the same with his boyish griefs and disappointments; he would have died rather than have allowed them to be seen. He put them out of his mind till he could steal away to his bedroom and tell them to God. For years he never even realised the beauty of a landscape or a picture except when he viewed it alone, whereupon it would burst suddenly upon him as though he awaked to a new world, for which he thanked its Maker as for a special gift. The mystic experience was the crown of all his strong emotions.

There were periods when for months or years this mood came on him frequently, and others when it was utterly absent and forgotten. He was never touched by that sentimental mysticism which brings to many religiously-minded boys and girls imaginative visions of saints and angels, or hallucinations when statues in the taper light seem to smile at them or bow the head. His experiences were almost impersonal; they seemed to rise with strong excitement from the deepest founts of life.

For instance, one afternoon in autumn—it may have been in his sixteenth year—he slipped away alone and climbed to the top of the central spire of the Cathedral to lean out above the thousand pinnacles and watch the pageant of the sunset on the distant

Alps. Dark clouds were gathering rapidly in the eastern and southern quarters, while the strong east wind made him seek shelter on the west side of the narrow gallery. Thus the storm took him unawares when it broke around the spire with terrific fury. The first warning was a blinding flash, instantly followed by a deafening thunderclap.

The boy fell on his knees and crouching under the tiny ledge cried aloud to God to save him from destruction. Then in the pause that followed, broken only by the pattering of hail and the shriek of the wind amid the pinnacles, suddenly he was filled with a mystic exaltation, as this thought rang through his mind: "The greater the peril around me, the nearer God is to me."

He cried out and defied the tempest in the familiar words of the great compline psalm: "*Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei coeli commorabitur.*" Fragments of the glorious verses sang within him, broken and incomplete, but charged with an intensity of meaning. "*Scapulis suis obumbrabit tibi, et sub pennis ejus sperabis. Scuto circumdabit te veritas ejus; non timebis a timore nocturno . . . Quoniam Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis.*"

There were wings all about him in the wind; when the gusts carried away his cap over the parapet he did not notice it. The lightning flickered harmlessly about him; it seemed like the fiery sword that a mighty Seraph wielded, while he knelt within the folds of its protecting robe. The thunder pealed and boomed, but frightened him no more. At every flash

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he looked down on the innumerable saints upon the buttresses, and seeing them thus, there leapt into his mind a vivid and abiding image of the intercession of the Church before the Judgment of the wrath of God.

Fiercer and fiercer surged the tide of spiritual passion in him. His breathing took a slower, deeper rhythm, and he felt a blissful tremor pass and repass through all his frame. For an unmeasured period of time he became unconscious of the storm, of the rain that beat upon his face and drenched his clothes, of the wind that a little while before had seemed as if about to tear him from his rocking height and carry him over the balustrade into the gulf, of the flashings and the deafening peals, of everything except one almighty and absorbing Presence, that bathed him in a sea of glory and intoxicating bliss.

Father Bernardo, friar and priest, living over again in thought that pregnant hour, wondered if, for all his vows and sacrifice and the daily offering of the Mass, the sense of the Divine Presence had ever been again so near and real to him as then.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEART OF A BOY

I

WHEN Anselmo was in his seventeenth year he lost his health from overwork and overgrowth together with insomnia, induced by the habit of nocturnal argument. His doctor deprived him of his books and recommended mountain air. Accordingly towards the end of June, his father, Viola and he journeyed into Switzerland, where they passed three months amid a waving sea of Alpine flowers. For the first month the boy was intoxicated with the brightness and the beauty; he panted breathlessly up the steep slopes, enraptured when he caught a glimpse of some new snowy peak. On every second day he made his limbs so stiff with climbing that all the next he had perforce to lie in the meadows nearer home. During his climbs he wrote many ragged and exuberant sonnets, but at night he was far too weary to do anything but sleep. He was overjoyed with the foaming waterfalls, the deep ravines and twilight forests; he liked to stand like a goat on the edge of some projecting rock and gaze down into the gulfs of clear bright air below him. For a few months he became almost a natural, irresponsible boy, no longer the staid comrade of an old eccentric scholar nor the

critical student of philosophies. He grew impatient of the slow short walks with his father and delicate sister, of listening to wise talk or stories, of loitering in the meadows to collect strange flowers. He longed to run, to climb, to astonish others by his exploits; his day dreams took a worldlier tone; he was confident and happy.

After they had stayed about two months in Switzerland there occurred an episode which, however trivial in recollection, was yet fraught with a strange importance in the unfolding of his life.

One evening, hastening homewards from a long ramble on the mountains, singing with happiness and boyish health, Anselmo lost his way in the meadows of the higher slopes and found himself among the ricks around a little chalet. Looking about for a peasant to direct him, he saw a tall fair girl of his own age milking a red and white cow within an open stable door. At his question the girl glanced up from her task and replied politely that if he would wait for a few moments she would show him his nearest way.

Some subtle influence at the sight of her blue eyes and flushed face drew him irresistibly towards her. He stared at her strong white arms, her full neck and the glimpse of her bosom at the opening of her bodice, an exquisite tremor of desire passing through his frame. She trembled also as she pressed the udder; some subtle effluence seemed to involve them both like a strange exhalation.

"What beautiful milk you have there!" he stammered, when at length she rose from her stool.

"Are you thirsty? Would you like to drink some?"

See, how foaming and warm it is! But you must drink it out of the pail," she added, blushing and laughing as she lifted it up to his face. "Come, I'll hold it as you drink."

Anselmo put his lips to the thick rim and his hand upon hers, vainly endeavouring to prevent her from tilting it too fast. As he drank, her blue eyes dilated, until they seemed to daze his senses. The warm milk ran over his chin and dripped down on to his clothes.

"Stop! Stop!" he gasped after a few seconds.

The girl laughed, showing strong white teeth. "What a funny little mouth you have!" she said archly. "It's really no use for drinking, but I suppose it can kiss all the same."

The boy trembled, longing but not daring to accept the challenge.

"Here, wait! I will wipe you," she laughed, and setting the pail on the ground she rubbed his coat and dabbed his chin with the corner of her apron. Suddenly she flung her arms around his neck and kissed him twice on the lips.

The next instant she had picked up her pail and darted into the house, while Anselmo stood bewildered, longing to follow her.

"Come back!" he cried. "You haven't shown me my path after all!" But the girl did not appear again. He waited for a few minutes and then rushed down the meadows, his brain throbbing with a strange delight.

He thought about her all that evening and every night for weeks. He grew restless, discontented and impatient with his father. He continued his long,

solitary rambles, being at times excited and at others listless and depressed. For hours he lurked in the woods above, watching for her, and, half-ashamed, made various excuses for passing by her chalet. He dreamed of settling some day in the mountains, of marrying her and writing his philosophy while she attended to their cows. Sometimes he saw her in the distance working with other peasants. The first time that he passed and wished her good-evening, she looked up half maliciously and laughed.

At length one day he accosted her as she sat outside the house with an old woman shelling peas. She did not glance up from the bowl upon her lap.

"Will you kindly show me the right way down to the highroad?" he stammered. "I find these small paths so confusing."

"Surely, sir!" answered the old woman. "Go, Minna, show the gentleman the way at once!"

The girl put down her bowl with evident reluctance and walked a few steps in silence beside the boy.

"Minna!" he began at length when they were out of the old woman's earshot.

"Don't call me by that name!" she interrupted.

"But after you kissed me? You have made me love you. Don't you remember?"

"No."

"How can you tell me a lie like that?" he cried.

"Don't you yet know the way to the village?" she retorted. "Now do be good and go away, and don't come any more or you will get me into trouble. Promise me, and I will give you one last kiss for good-bye."

"No," cried the boy angrily, "I can't think why you wanted to do it before."

"You looked so good! I'm afraid you are really much better than I am."

His face burning, his heart bursting, he rushed down the slopes to the hotel and locked himself into his room. At supper-time he pleaded headache; lying upon his bed he tossed and cried. On the next day his mood of disillusion was extended to the land itself; he realised how by the money-seeking toys of man the Alps are desecrate of their old dignity. The ledges and towering points of rock became mere brackets to support hotels and chalet-restaurants; the foaming waterfalls were tamed for turning little wheels. The dizzy gulfs and grim ravines were bridged by small electric trains; even the glaciers seemed to pose as backgrounds for snap-shots of climbing parties.

Yet these days of disenchantment marked a term of stealthy conquest, whereby his soul enriched her world with the keys of a new realm.

II

When Anselmo returned to Milan the current of his external life ran stronger. The friar could now recall many incidents of the succeeding months, whereas the previous years had little history beyond that of his thoughts. Before he went away he would refuse to go for long walks with his cousins, but after his return these expeditions became the chief joys of his weeks. He spent his pocket-money in giving

pleasure to his comrades instead of buying books with it.

The one discordant element upon these holidays was a growing antagonism between him and his elder cousins. Angelo and Pietro had of late adopted the attitude of aggressive materialism, characteristic of a certain class of modern Italy, which led them into perpetual discussions with Anselmo.

One day as they were sitting in a little country café under a pergola of vine-leaves beside the dusty road, Angelo began the argument with the sole object of exasperating his cousin.

How vividly the whole scene rose into the friar's memory! He could see the long white road between the dusty hedgerows, the vineyards, the small brown shanty of the restaurant, the flickering discs of sunlight through the leaves dancing upon the wooden tables, the tall poles ornamented with little iron flags and bells that jingled in the breeze. The girls had thrown their hats upon a chair, while, flushed and dusty from their walk, the boys were lolling on the yellow benches.

"What Italy needs," cried Angelo dogmatically, "is economic and industrial enterprise, factories, machines, electricity; this is what you *will* not realise."

"You know that we are all agreed about that," answered Anselmo.

"No, we are *not* agreed," went on Angelo aggressively, "for the important point is this. If the Church with her festivals and holidays, her ignorance and her idle horde of monks and priests continues to stand in the way of progress, then the Church must

go; and if the artists, poets and foreigners who rave about mediæval streets and buildings stop the way with their outcries, they will have to clear out also. Italy can do without them."

His speech throughout was punctuated by his brother's uproarious applause.

"But without her ancient beauty, Italy would not be Italy, but a poor imitation of America," replied Anselmo. "What is the good of your talking about art or religion which you don't understand in the least?"

"What is the good of these perpetual arguments?" said Vittoria quietly. "Some people are born able to see the beauty of nature, of art, religion and poetry, others are born to be engineers and to see the beauty of machinery."

"Some people seem to be born unable to live without snivelling priests and cant about saints and souls," sneered Angelo, but he did not finish his speech, for Anselmo, his face livid, his brain burning, flung his glass full at his cousin, striking him on the forehead and cutting it open. He heard Viola's scream, Pietro's oath, the exclamations of the waiters and a party of cyclists as they started up from a neighbouring table. He saw the red gash on Angelo's white face as without a word he strode out of the restaurant and hurried hatless along the road. Shame at the uproar and remorse for his deed drowned his rage; he walked blindly, he knew not whither.

After a few minutes he heard his name called breathlessly by someone running after him. He turned and waited, arrogantly defiant. It was Vit-

toria. Holding out his hat, she ran up and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Anselmo, you poor dear, how much you are suffering!" she panted. With a woman's instinct she knew well which of the party needed most her help. Her large dark eyes were full of tears, her cheeks flushed, her hair disordered; there was a little spot of her brother's blood upon the front of her dress.

With a sudden gush of gratitude Anselmo folded her in his arms and kissed her passionately on the cheek and lips.

She gasped as she thrust him gently back, turning her face away from him. For a few moments neither spoke; only their hearts beat wildly and exultantly.

At length he burst out: "Oh, Vittoria! Do you think I have really hurt him? Will it leave a mark?"

She reassured him. "Don't worry over it! It isn't serious. I left them all doctoring him. I will tell him how sorry and miserable you are about it; and now I must run back. Perhaps you had better go straight home, while we four take a carriage."

"Stay with me! Stay with me!" he implored, holding her left hand fast in both of his.

"No! no! I must go at once! Anselmo!"

He kissed it twice before she freed herself and ran back to her brothers.

The boy walked home alone almost in rapture, careless of what anyone else in the world should think of him, for the warmth of her sympathy made all the others utterly remote and unimportant; he was entirely lonely save for her. How infinitely wonderful she was and how he loved her! He could not un-

derstand how he had been blind to her beauty for so long. He idealised with a romantic pride her every word and action; feeling an extraordinary exaltation in her image, mingled with a poignant but voluptuous fear and fits of trembling at the thought of her touch, her kiss, her caress. Emotional currents reminiscent of his feelings for the peasant girl in Switzerland poured their force into this new channel, but purified by a finer and more rational romantic strain. The thought of Vittoria did not cause him depression or insomnia; he worked at his books the harder for her sake; he had not continually to defend his love at the bar of his disapproving reason.

After this the holiday expeditions became the golden links of week to week. By Vittoria's good offices the quarrel with Angelo was soon forgiven, though for the future certain topics were debarred. But Anselmo walked henceforth beside Vittoria; he never thought he had so much to talk about to anyone. Albeit barely sixteen, she understood his theories and often by a flash of intuition could sum up in a phrase ideas which he had laboured out in weeks of study. It made his own thoughts clearer to tell them to so good a listener; her faith made his doubts of less importance, while her sympathy painted with a rosier glow the white fire of his aspirations.

Sometimes they talked of Dante. Anselmo had long felt the lurid power of the darker scenes of the *Inferno*; Vittoria unveiled to him the glittering treasure of the *Paradise*. At night he wrote verses for her, embodying her thoughts; she slept with her shutters open in order to awake as soon as it was light

and learn by heart long cantos, which she recited on their next walk together. Then they read the *Vita Nuova* and told one another their own love-tale in its words.

One day Anselmo overheard the fragment of a conversation between his aunt and uncle.

"I have never approved of cousins marrying," said the latter doubtfully.

"Ah, but then we must remember that his mother was a foreigner and that makes a great difference," replied his aunt.

The blood leaped in the boy's veins as he understood their meaning in a moment apocalyptic of the Heaven in his heart. He lived the next few days in a ferment of pride and joy, paving the most familiar streets with gold. In his intercourse with others that moment meant a great step towards manhood. Vittoria was quick to note the change in his manner towards herself and the veil of shyness which fell upon their comradeship only made her yet more lovely in his eyes.

Looking back into his boyhood's heart with his manhood's eyes, Bernardo wondered what change had ripened in his nature during those months in Switzerland. Would Vittoria have remained for him, as Viola, a sister, had not the instinctive flame within him been stirred by the peasant girl upon the mountains at a period when his mind was freed from the obsession of his books? But if he had not loved Vittoria, would he be sitting then, thus, in that cell?

For months his love had seemed to suffuse with a new spring the whole flower of his life. If Minna,

the Swiss peasant girl, were his Lucia, by whose first motion he was called and his feet set upon the road to the Earthly Paradise, Vittoria had henceforth become his Beatrice to lead him through the Heavens of Intellectual Beauty.

CHAPTER V

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ORLANDO

I

ORLANDO entered into Anselmo's life at a period when the absence of Vittoria emphasised the influence of his friendship. For in the following spring the girl was sent to Lausanne, ostensibly to complete her education, actually because the family wisdom considered that temporary absence was advisable. Anselmo buried his grief in a fresh burst of energy which carried him even into the works of Kant. Meanwhile they wrote to each other twice a week.

Anselmo now attended philosophical lectures at the University of Pavia, whither he went in the train day by day with hundreds of other students of his age. But his shyness kept him aloof from the sharing of their interests, for shyness was one of the chief factors of his youth. Partly inherited from his father, who would stammer and contradict himself if a stranger accosted him in the street to ask the way, it was further developed by his solitary boyhood and by the widening gulf between his outward and his inward life. He scarcely ever met any women besides Vittoria and Viola, the old servants and his aunts. Women seemed to him as a race apart, speak-

ing a different language and thinking different thoughts. Sometimes he looked at them in trams and trains and wondered what sort of things they did when they were together. On several occasions when he was obliged to talk to ladies he lost his head and disgraced himself. Coarse expressions would rush to his lips whenever he spoke to a lady, words which he would never have thought of using in the presence of men, for the reason that it would not have mattered much if he did do so. Sometimes he told falsehoods from sheer nervousness, and afterwards blushinglly retracted them. "I did not do so and so, as I told you just now. It is untrue. I am sorry; I don't know why I said it." On one occasion, when he was invited with his cousins out to dinner, he was seized with panic; he suddenly walked out of the drawing-room, crossed the hall and without answering the astonished servants, opened the front door and fled home without his hat and coat. How he suffered the next few days! He longed to be ill, but was too honest to feign an ailment. For a week he would not speak to his cousins, and for years after he dreaded to pass in the street the people he had slighted.

In the presence of men and boys of his own age he suffered far less acutely, albeit he was never at his ease with strangers. When he talked to anyone he was nearly always conscious of two streams of thought in his mind, one corresponding to his inner life, the other to the conventional tone of talk which he picked up from others. The former consisted of quiet criticism or philosophical comment from a general point of view — thoughts he was far too reserved

ever to divulge; the second was quite commonplace, so that its utterance disappointed and made people think he was a fool, or that he did not consider it worth his while to use his brains in talking to them. Every now and then, however, some remark of his would astonish by its subtlety or shrewdness, and his elders would look at him and wonder what was going on inside his head. But Anselmo was far more critical of himself than of others and absurdly sensitive about his neighbours' comments; often an unintentional slight would shut him in his shell for days together.

Under these circumstances it was only natural that his friends should be few. It seemed strange to him now as he looked back that the chief of them should have been Orlando Berardesca. Perhaps it was mere curiosity to know someone so utterly different from himself that had attracted Orlando. The first time they spoke was on a day when Anselmo came in late for a lecture to find that Orlando and other students had littered his desk and seat with coarse caricatures from the anti-clerical "Asino," because they knew that he went to Mass. The next time was on the occasion of an incident which had few parallels in Anselmo's peaceful life.

One afternoon he was returning through the most crowded thoroughfare of the city, his mind as usual engrossed by some train of philosophical argument, when suddenly he noticed a carter in the road urging his overloaded mules with a trick of barbarous cruelty. Anselmo started forward, the blood rushing to his brain, and before he realised his own act he heard his

voice ring out with a force that startled every passer-by within fifty yards. The carter turned on him and raised his whip with the look of an infuriated and frightened animal. For a few moments the boy faced him, pouring out the torrent of his indignation, till suddenly, as the man, lashed to frenzy by his words, seemed about to strike him, a quick athletic figure dashed between them and wrenched away the uplifted whip. Orlando, as ever, carried the crowd with him, and the big carter could do no more than submit. It was just like Orlando to appropriate the quarrel, although he had not started it, and to carry off as a trophy the weapon which had been illegally transformed into an instrument of torture. It was like him also, when he had further cowed his enemy by the added strength of his harangue, to give him money to buy a new whip in its place. The incident over, turning to Anselmo he linked his arm in his as though he had known him all his life, reminding him that he had dropped his note-books, and carefully wiping them as he helped to pick them up. He was not in the least affected by the sufferings of the animal, but had immensely enjoyed the excitement of the "row." Anselmo was still breathless with emotion when Orlando burst out laughing: "Well done! Well done! Oh, you were splendid! But I can't help laughing at you all the same, for you seem to be so extremely unexpected!" He apologised for his share in the "Asino" incident and escorted Anselmo to his house. Afterwards he came frequently to see him and insisted on taking him to his own home.

Orlando was the only son of one of Garibaldi's most

fervent followers, and the sphere of thought in which he had grown up was utterly unlike the cloistral atmosphere of the Casa Serafini. Of the same age as Anselmo — younger in mind, but older in knowledge of the world — he was very strong and finely made, with muscles like a young Greek athlete and a handsome head covered with black curling hair, which grew so stubbornly and thickly that it was impossible to brush it down or part it.

He had three rooms to himself in his parents' flat, with an outlook over the housetops towards the Alps and all the sunshine that Anselmo's own home lacked. His chief room was a large studio, decorated with coloured stuffs and plaster casts of modern statues and reliefs, the subjects of which were chiefly symbolical figures of naked Herculean type in various attitudes of strain. On his walls were vigorous etchings of the same school as the statues — dark pictures of giants labouring at glowing furnaces, of engines upon iron bridges breathing smoke into a rainy twilight, of glimmering estuaries that teemed with spectral shipping, and glittering trains like snakes of fire drawn across the darkness. The only art Anselmo knew till then was that of the pictures in the Brera, of the Last Supper of Leonardo, or of delicate bright-hued Madonnas in the wayside shrines and churches. Machines had seemed to him to be only the ugly devices of modern industry; here they were glorified as the sacred symbols of Man's revolt and victory.

In the middle of the studio stood a grand piano, on which Orlando played to him, singing him songs of Brahms and Schumann with a great tenor voice

that was being trained for opera. Hitherto Anselmo had known little more of music than church-music; the sudden development of his natural love of it, inherited perhaps in part from German ancestors, opened new senses and new worlds. Hour after hour he would sit enraptured, leading his friend on to sing by his genuine enthusiasm, until when at length he returned to his quiet home, his brain was throbbing with all the new sensations that he had experienced. The whole atmosphere of Orlando's rooms seemed to be charged with vital electricity; there was a magnetism in his personality which swept those near him in his wake.

At other times the opinions that he heard in the talks of Berardesca and his friends startled him no less than the pictures and the music, making him feel strangely backward and old-fashioned.

One discussion with an older student, a thin, tall, round-shouldered, spectacled, cadaverous-looking man, by name Zarena, particularly struck him, lingering now in his memory on account of the havoc it had played with his own less unconventional ideas.

"We must never forget," said Zarena magniloquently, "that our world is the creation of the strong and free and the gift of their favour to the weak and humble. I don't mean only that the stronger races in the past conquered the land, governed it and gave it all the forms and laws by which we live, inventing all our administrative, legal, social and economic machinery as well as our productive instruments, from the spade and the plough to the steam-engine and the dynamo. I mean much more than all this. They im-

posed by the strength of their thought upon the human consciousness its standards and values, intellectual, moral, æsthetic and religious, all in fact that we call 'truth.' Our very senses, our modes of perception, conception and mutual intercourse are the bequest of those ancestors who by stronger life-development proved themselves fittest for survival, and so transmitted their creations and creative force to us."

"But do you not admit a transcendent guiding intelligence in Evolution?" asked Anselmo.

"I see no reason to admit any force more personal than an immanent Will-to-live, urging Its vessels to create and so adapt themselves more perfectly in order to survive."

"But what then is the object and purpose of our living?"

"There is no purpose, unless for us to be in those greater and nobler worlds that our descendants will create through the vital stream that we transmit to them. But the point is that if evolution is to go forward, the strong must hold the weak enslaved and continue to create the future according to their larger vision and more daring will. It is for the swift to set the pace of progress. Democracy and socialism are especially our enemies, because they set up the common and mediocre men as the progenitors of that future world which should be exclusively the work of the strong and the enlightened."

"But do you see no virtue in justice or pity, for example?" objected Anselmo.

"By the exaltation of justice and pity the weak

have tricked and deluded the strong in order to perpetuate their own existence, which it should be the supreme object of our truer vision to eliminate. There is but one good work and that is new creation, and but one virtue in the cosmic view, and that is strength."

Zarena lent Anselmo the works of Nietzsche, the apostle of this Man-God who creates and renews the world. Anselmo's intellect was stimulated by the vigour and originality, albeit the brutality of these doctrines repelled his gentler feelings. For a while his mind was vanquished by the heady draughts of this new wine and the mystic circle in his soul contracted, as the pupil of an eye when struck by a dazzling light. He could no longer read without distraction; his faith underwent a second crisis, similar to that when he had first received the stimulus of his new books.

But such a world of thought was not true or natural for Anselmo; alone he was utterly unable to sustain it. For a few months it held him like a strong intoxication; it was swept away by the first breath of spiritual loneliness that came with sudden and overwhelming pain.

But the thought of Nietzsche and Zarena brought back another memory into the friar's mind. Meeting his fellow student again nearly two years later, he had renewed the discussion.

"There seems to me to be a flaw in your reasoning," he said, "because you limit 'strength' to aggressive intellectual or physical force. To be fair, you should include that moral or spiritual power,

which is the strength of Christ. Pity, resignation and justice may be the weapons of the physical or intellectual weakling, but since they actually are so powerful, he who wields them is not really weak but strong, though in a different way. You assume that all creation is the enlarging of the subjective world of human consciousness by knowledge and invention, but you ignore its enriching and adornment by awe, love, sacrifice and spiritual refinement."

This distinction had since become for Bernardo the typical mark of the division between the kingdoms of the old God and the new.

CHAPTER VI

HIS FATHER'S DEATH

I

Two o'clock struck on the far bells of Assisi. The friar was recalled from his dreams and suddenly became aware of the glory of the night through the black frame of his little window. For the first time since he had left his bed at midnight, he arose from his seat before the table and leaned out for a few minutes into the moonbeams.

He thought of his saint with a soft glow of comfort, and of the memories of that perfect life enshrined within the landscape in his view. Out of sight was the house of his birth, the city of his youthful revelries and the mountain solitudes of his first aspirations, but from Perugia, bright with twinkling lamps upon her hilltops — where he had lain sick and in prison — to Spoleto, dimly guessed as a grey dot against the distant eastern mountains — where he had been turned back by a dream from knightly ventures — the theatre of his dearest acts lay clearly revealed to the eyes of the watcher by the moon.

At Foligno, just beyond the spur of Spello, he had sold his father's cloth for money to restore the ruined chapel of his conversion; at Rivotorto, marked to-day by yon tall isolated church, he had dwelt with his

first comrades; at the little Portion, where the low lights glimmered beneath the dark dome of St. Mary of the Angels, he had received the saintly mother of his second Order, and for years of faith and trial, prayer and vigil had made his best-loved home. Opposite, among the fields hard by Bevagna the birds had listened to his exhortation; in the garden just below the window he had written his great canticle of praise; and after he had breathed his last in the rude cell among the vineyards, up yonder stony path his body had been carried that Sister Clare might kiss the sacred wounds.

Had not he too looked back on his past life in dark hours of temptation? Did not he too confront the eternal question of God's ruling, at moments when the witness of the still small voice of faith seems to be drowned in the loud clamour of the wider worldly life?

Bernardo murmured a prayer and sighed as he turned to his little table; he sat down and laid his hands on the last sheet of his writing as before.

II

As the stream of his memories flowed once more before him, the face of his sister Viola arose out of the mists of his past life. A strangely quiet child, seeming to lack the vital power to develop, even when she was sixteen no one could imagine her as ever likely to become a woman. With her great wondering eyes and tiny face, framed in masses of dark hair, she looked like some half-tamed woodland creature, still

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half-afraid and half-puzzled at the human life around her.

One day, not long before Christmas, the whole family went to the theatre. On the way back they waited for a tramcar while a bitter wind blew off the Alpine fields of ice. It happened to Viola as it had happened to her mother; she caught a chill, it attacked her lungs, and she died.

Anselmo knew by this time that the reason why he had not seen his father for some months after his mother's death was that in his grief he had been practically insane. At the sudden illness and death of his beloved child, the man was utterly prostrate and distracted. At first, although not actually demented, he suffered from constant delusions, his moods alternating between ghastly depression and terror, when he would refuse to eat or rest, and still more painful fits of childish mirth. His son was now nineteen, and he took the whole burden of the nursing upon himself. The specialists thought that it might prove to be only a temporary derangement, as had been the previous attack after the death of his wife. A male nurse was engaged to relieve the long watches, but Anselmo was forced to throw his work aside at the most critical point in his career, in order to devote his whole energy to the battle for his father's reason.

When the doctors prescribed change, he hired a little villa at Camogli on the Genoese Riviera, where day after day for six bitter months, gazing over the sunlit sea across the olive terraces, climbing the steep stony tracks between orange-groves or ilex, or sitting at evening in the small bare lamplit rooms, he an-

swered endless questions and soothed a thousand fears. Stealing away for an hour occasionally, he refreshed his soul with the scenes of beauty round them. Above them rose the pine-clad steeps of the Portofino promontory; before them, dotted with white villages, lay the long curves of the gentle coast to Genoa; opposite, in clear weather, hung the exquisite snowy peaks of the Maritime Alps, like an aerial pyramid of windless cloud — these and the thick packets of Vittoria's letters which he carried like a religious relic in the breast pocket of his coat to read and reread in solitude, formed his chief solace during these months of pain. But the moments of repose were rare and brief, for a succession of ineffectual nurses proved that the only will that could control the terrors and caprices of this unhappy man was that of his young son.

Night after night he was called from his sleep to restrain the impulses of some wild mood by the power of his quiet presence and the firmness of his voice and manner. Dawn after dawn he saw the pale light growing above the violet horizon with straining eyes that had not closed. In despair he fought a losing battle against the disruptive forces of old age, nervous and physical debility, and twenty years of aimless life with no habit of regular thought. The hopes raised by a day of comparative calm would be dashed in an hour of terror and tempestuous change. Bit-terest of all was to see his father, whose every word and action he had revered, unstable and capricious as a child. Frequently the hideous grotesqueness of his actions not only wounded, but still more humiliated

Anselmo. In nervous restlessness the unhappy man liked to take long walks into the neighbouring fashionable resorts, where his conduct often excited compassionate or contemptuous comment. The constant strife demanded not only infinite self-control and patience, but a sternness and authority that it bruised Anselmo's heart to use.

Among the friar's memories of these terrible months stood out most vividly that of a pilgrimage which they had made to the celebrated shrine of Our Lady of Montallegro, situated near the summit of a mountain overlooking the gulf of Rapallo. The legend tells how, in the sixteenth century, the Virgin appeared to a peasant on the hillside, leaving as a proof of her appearance a picture of her Assumption, which was removed in some mysterious manner from Ragusa. Every year at certain festivals thousands flock from all parts to this sanctuary, where many miracles of healing are recorded and graces are commemorated by innumerable votive hearts.

The parish priest of Camogli, who had noticed with compassion in his church the tall grave youth controlling the moods of his demented father, was the first to suggest that they should make the pilgrimage after due preparation of the patient's mind by special prayers during the two preceding weeks.

Accordingly on a hot May afternoon, Anselmo and his father with their attendant, and a peasant to carry various necessities for the night, climbed the long steep cobbled track to the shrine upon the mountains. They had reserved rooms in the hostel of the convent, where at first the finer air, the splendid views,

and the peaceful isolation, seemed to have a tranquillising influence on the patient. But, before long, pilgrim companies began to arrive, and to encamp for the night in the grove and the fields around the buildings. They carried sick and aged upon beds and stretchers, they quarrelled and disputed over resting places, they sang interminable pilgrim hymns, in one of which the piercing refrain occurred no less than two hundred times. The night with such crowds below the windows was not a peaceful one.

The next day in the small but richly decorated church hundreds made communion, while thousands drank of the sacred spring that flows from the rock behind the altar. When the innumerable masses ceased, the interminable hymns began again. The ringing melodies, the strident tones with several of the pleading verses lingered still within the friar's memory :

" In questa misera
Valle infelice
Tutti t'invocano
Soccorritrice.

" Pietosa mostrati
Con l'anima mia,
Madre dei miseri,
Santa Maria !

" Madre piú tenera
Di te non v'è,
O Santa Vergine,
Prega per me ! "

He could see again in fancy the richly painted vaults of the ornate interior, the walls covered from

floor to gilded cornice with votive offerings in little frames; the steps, the nave, the lesser chapels and the sunlit square before the building, thronged with devout perspiring men and women; the altar with its blaze of tapers glinting over the innumerable silver hearts, hung in long curving lines to resemble the branches of some vast symbolic tree, out of the central trunk of which flowered the miraculous picture.

The whole scene must have been severely trying to the almost demented man beside him, who nevertheless for a long while remained on his chair in silence, subdued by the crowd or dazed by some internal struggle. Anselmo, kneeling on the floor beside him, put forth his utmost strength in prayer that some deep impression from that hour might fix itself amid the welter of his terrors and delusions. He felt his spirit to be swept along by the intensity of feeling around him, the prayers of a thousand souls made one through the spiritual communion of one passionate thought. Surely the Blessed Mother of God must respond to such a cry?

But suddenly the strain became intolerable to his father, who started up, threw out his arms wildly and exclaimed:

"What is the good of all these prayers to me, when God has put Hell into my brain?"

At this cry there was almost a panic among those kneeling near them, fortunately drowned by the thunder of the hymn. After infinite difficulty Anselmo with the aid of their attendant led his father from the church and back to their little villa in Camogli. The good work of the previous months of quiet was un-

done; henceforward 'Anselmo's influence over his father's mind noticeably diminished.

It was during these bitter months that his boyhood ended and he grew prematurely to a man. His face lost its boyish roundness, and, with the angularity of feature, a tendency to abruptness and stiffness in his manner was accentuated. It was during this time, perhaps, that a curious magnetic intensity of gaze became the habit of his eyes. It was now also that he first acquired that genius of prayer, which is the supremest spiritual gift, the golden key of the Eternal Presence.

Looking back, it seemed to him that since this period of crisis he had never thought or acted freely without some feeling of restraint, some spiritual pre-occupation. It was as though he were guided and prevented at every step. Possibly his period of expansion closed too abruptly; his laughter lost its gaiety, and his most poignant grief left him dry-eyed. It was as though his soul were now withdrawn from the creating of external kingdoms to concentrate her strength upon the world within herself.

III

When the lease of the *villino* at Camogli had expired and the summer heat became too great to allow them to stay longer on the coast, Anselmo found a quieter retreat in a lonely little house among the Apennines. In several ways the choice was not a happy one, for in spite of the wide views and cooler breezes from the north, the tragic grandeur of the

mountains had a depressing influence on his patient after the smiling bays of the sunny Riviera. There was much stone cut in the neighbourhood, the treeless hills were gashed with high forbidding quarries, and the inhabitants of the little villages seemed almost savage in their grinding poverty. Another drawback was the distance from a doctor and the difficulty of obtaining regular supplies of food and medicines. But the shame that Anselmo had suffered when he noted the fear, pity or amusement which the obvious symptoms of his father's illness excited among the well-dressed crowd in the more fashionable places, caused him to long for solitude, where he could wrestle with these moods alone, unmarked.

For three months more, in this lonely plateau among the hills the bitter strife went on, growing every day more hopeless, until suddenly it ended in horror and defeat. The supply of sedatives was running out and the irregularity of the posts made Anselmo fearful of delay. He walked down to the nearest town to seek a temporary substitute, leaving his father under the charge of his nurse and a single servant.

He returned late at night to find the house deserted; to learn that the patient had escaped the vigilance of his keepers, and that they were seeking him upon the hills. There had been a heavy thunderstorm that afternoon, and thunder caused increased excitement.

Without stopping to break his fast, Anselmo rushed out into the darkness and spent a night of horror wandering over the hillside under a cloudy, threatening sky, plunging through marshes up to his knees, stumbling over moorland roots and boulders, peering

into thickets, calling in vain across black ravines, in impotent despair of ever finding, and yet in aching dread of that which might be found.

But daylight brought the truth at last. Prone on the loose stones his father lay at the bottom of a lofty quarry, dead, shattered, unrecognisable. Anselmo was the first to touch him, to lift and carry him, with the aid of strangers, to the house. The next day he brought him back by train through Milan, and buried him at Como between Viola and his wife.

CHAPTER VII

ANSELMO'S CAREER

I

ANSELMO returned to Milan and threw himself once more into his work. But he felt as though the edge of his mind were blunted by the long struggle and ultimate defeat. He craved for rest, and yet was restless; he felt a longing to re-open the old problems in his books, and yet knew that they were not the same to him. As he turned the familiar pages they seemed to speak of ancient battles fought out for dead causes. He entered the competition for a prize, which once was easily within his grasp; it no longer appeared worth winning, and it was won by a younger and inferior man.

The old home to which he returned was more sombre than ever without Viola and his father. He never knew before how gloomy, ugly and sinister the rooms could be, but nevertheless they were still so sacred that he refused to give them up. At times they seemed to be full of ghosts; at times he felt that they fitted his own mood of melancholy, emptiness and self-distrust, which was the inevitable result of the excessive nervous strain. The fatal issue of his long struggle had brought about the second crisis of his faith,

which poignantly aggravated his suffering. In the sleepless hours of the night he would pace up and down as his father had done before him, and wonder if his mind were outworn too. This neurasthenic breakdown was in part due to exhaustion, but still more to the reaction and relaxation from suspense.

During the long months of absence Vittoria's letters of sympathy had given him his brightest moments of relief. She had meanwhile returned to Milan, and now he needed more than ever the shelter of her love. Yet some unknown barrier had arisen between them. Perhaps in the reaction from his self-suppression he demanded more than she could give him. He needed something warmer and more intimate than the romantic sympathy of their former comradeship. Her gentle speeches did not strike deep enough to stir him, not even the expression of her faith in him. He needed the touch of her hands, her kiss, her caress; he wanted to lay his head upon her shoulder, and let himself go. She seemed to be afraid that he should break down in her presence. He knew that she was too sincere to feign what she did not feel.

Perhaps he scared her by his gloom and chilled her by his silence. Possibly she had never felt towards him more than a girlish admiration gilded by romance. Certainly she found him changed and different from the image of the boy she had carried in her heart. When they were together, they were each conscious of a curb, and they treated one another with a deference that kept their souls apart. He was ashamed of his physical desire for her, and so was abased still more in his own eyes; he did not under-

stand how anyone so delicate and beautiful as she could love him; her presence became a source of trouble rather than of strength.

It was chiefly from Orlando that he drew the power to bind about his soul the strands of his old life. There was help for him in every movement of that well-knit body, every toss of that handsome head, every glance of the bright, clear eyes.

With what pride he introduced him to Vittoria! How naively he made him show off his accomplishments by singing and playing to her! He gave Vittoria duets to sing in her rich contralto with Orlando, who modulated his great notes to hers. The three friends saw a great deal of one another; they arranged excursions with her brothers and their friends, and then, by lingering over a view or wayside shrine, they contrived to be left behind to walk together.

How kind they were to him, wrestling with his depression as he had wrestled with his father's! When he did not win his prize, Vittoria said: "It only shows that your mind is not of the usual type. If it were not for your disappointment, I should almost be glad that you have not won it, for now you will realise yourself more freely." When he complained that his brain was duller than before, she said: "It must be developing in another way. I think from your letters that you were growing too much like the dull professors, who cannot feel because they are always reasoning." Perhaps she was right; she was so wise and kind; like an elder sister, in spite of her youth.

But Vittoria's encouragement was not re-echoed by



her family, who began to look doubtfully upon the prospect of their marriage. The younger and more vigorous branch of the Serafini family had always regarded the unworldly methods of the elder with ill-concealed impatience bordering on contempt. During the lifetime of Anselmo's father, despite the fact that the two brothers dwelt under the same roof, there had been little sympathy or mutual understanding. The cloistral bringing-up and the unpractical studies of Anselmo in particular had been a subject of constant criticism. Now the tacit understanding between him and Vittoria was made conditional on his adoption of some practical career. Especially since he had failed to win the prize he aimed at, and thus had exploded once and for ever any illusions created by his father's pride, regarding his extraordinary powers, the whole family, with the exception of Vittoria, united in urging him to come to an immediate decision by hints and suggestions, leading questions and advice.

Pietro and Angelo were already working engineers, who promised to push their way in the world, and to make all secondary considerations subservient to the aim of "getting on." "Life is a serious matter," one of them would gravely tell him. "It is every man's duty to fulfil his part in the work of civilised society, and to add to the world's production of wealth, be it only a pair of boots a day. In your education and nourishment so much of the world's wealth has been invested, and you owe it to the community to pay it back with interest by the products of your labour." This they said and more to the same effect,

in order to show that they belonged to the party of progress, and disapproved of Monasticism and the old Catholic ideals.

Anselmo, disgusted by such solemn cant, would hotly maintain the contrary opinion. Did they personally work for the benefit of society or to make money for themselves? How many others did they thrust aside in their race for wealth? Was not the real problem to-day to find labour for all? Was not society, with its wanton waste, and its perpetual change of restless fashion, suffering rather from excess of production and lack of simplicity? Since the tide of industrialism had swept over Europe was it not the principal aim of each struggling individual to create new fields of labour by the invention of a new luxury for the rich or the flattery of some new form of the old vices, the desire for display and novelty? Was it not now the spiritual side of life that needed emphasis? He poured contempt upon the false ideals which he believed had been unduly exalted by the generation that had succeeded the men who made united Italy. In the bourgeois class around him, he asserted, people talked of nothing but money or their stomachs.

The boyish exaggeration of this attitude only further incensed the family and caused them to conjecture that Anselmo would prove as great a failure as his father. His aunt viewed the attraction of the handsome son of the Berardesca into Vittoria's orbit with unmingled satisfaction. On the other hand, the opposition to his ideals accentuated them in Anselmo's mind. Material ambitions were discounted, spiritual and intellectual aims upheld. It was characteristic of

him all through youth that his instincts were developed and confirmed most strongly not by the influence of others, but their opposition. At this period when for some months he forsook all outward practice of religion the crudity of his cousins' materialism did his faith good service. With the exception of Vittoria, no one marked his change of custom. Her brothers had long abandoned the old superstition, although in their masculine complacency they deemed it proper that their womenkind should go to Mass on festivals.

The question of Anselmo's career, however, was of real importance, for the small income he had inherited was not sufficient to support a wife. Finally he decided to accept a place in the firm of publishers to which his father and his mother's father had belonged, and for a few months after taking his degree at Pavia he studied the business of the great Milan office. The work was neither arduous nor uncongenial; it promised to give him access to all the most recent theological and philosophical literature, while leaving him time for reading. He was treated in the office with consideration and deference, both on account of his scholarship and of his hereditary connection through both parents with the firm. After a few months it was determined that he should be sent to Germany, to live in the house of his maternal uncle, who carried on the German branch at Frankfurt-am-Main.

Anselmo accepted the plan the less reluctantly because Orlando was now absent from Milan for his year of military service, from which he himself as an orphan was exempt. He sublet his flat to friends of

his cousins and set forth with new hope and new interest for new scenes.

II

The memory of the months Anselmo spent in Germany appeared now as a separate picture framed apart amid the unfolding vistas of his life. The experience was at first so new and strange to him that it diverted the current of his thoughts and restored his health and spirits.

It was curious to feel that these good-natured, stolid people were his kindred, and interesting to hear them speak familiarly about his mother, of whom he hitherto had known so little. His uncle was a kindly, self-important person, as befitted his position as head of a publishing firm of international repute. He was short, stout, and wore large gold-rimmed spectacles, which, in course of conversation, he would take off his pale-blue watery eyes and polish with the corner of his white silk pocket-handkerchief. He was always spotlessly neat in dress, and in everything else punctilious and precise. If any member of his family at table expressed an opinion or related an incident, he never appeared to understand outright, but insisted on meticulous examination of each detail until the points had been repeated three times over. Then he said: "Ach, so, I have it all at last," and glanced around the family circle as though looking for applause. It seemed to Anselmo that his favourite word and particular ideal was "gründlich."

His wife was — just his wife, large, stout and spec-

tacted, a silent, living monument to the importance of "the Professor." Of his children, the elder daughter, a handsome florid woman, was married to a middle-aged merchant of the town; the elder son, Rudolf, was in his father's office; the second, Otto, serving his last military year; while Carlotta, the youngest child, a fat, plain girl, with pale plaits of hair and an indifferent complexion, helped her mother and the single servant in the kitchen, and exasperated Anselmo with nervous giggling and sentimental answers whenever he addressed her.

The family lived in a comfortable flat, of which the largest room was the professor's library, wherein no one presumed to set foot without special cause. For the rest, the only things that particularly struck Anselmo were the double-windows and the central-heating apparatus, which made the air intolerable to him in the winter.

The Kröner received their kinsman with genial kindness. The professor won his gratitude by a tactful reference to his father's profound scholarship, and the suggestion that his only fault was that he loved his wife, the speaker's sainted sister, but too well. As he said this, the ready tears streamed from his eyes; then he wiped his spectacles and shook Anselmo warmly by the hand.

On the following Sunday a dinner to a dozen friends was given in honour of the newcomer; for several days the *Frau Professor* was immensely concerned about it. At the last moment she approached Anselmo and whispered apologetically: "Will you excuse it if Herr Gutsch goes in before you? You see, he is our most

celebrated fellow-citizen, whereas you are so young. But I do not forget that you are of noble birth."

On the whole, Anselmo liked them and was liked by them, in spite of the fact that his smaller appetite made his aunt insist he was fastidious. Whenever he declined a second helping she would enter upon a disquisition as to the true superiority of German to Italian cookery, but little mollified by his indifferent assent. Before long she decided that he must have been delicate from birth, and henceforth tried to coddle him with cups of soup or milk and cautions about draughts, over-exertion and damp socks. Anselmo's open bedroom window in the winter struck her as wanton waste of heat for which they paid. He remained so utterly oblivious to all questions of health and physical comfort that he never appreciated all her kindness.

But he worked hard in the office, in his spare time reading the German classics and much modern German philosophy. With the others he made excursions on the river or sat drinking beer or coffee in the public gardens. But best of all he loved the music, the opera, the great orchestral symphonies and chamber concerts, to all of which the Kröner family encouraged him to go in order that he might more fully realise the musical supremacy of Germany. They did not consider that he was sufficiently proud of being half a German. Anselmo loved the music, partly for its own sake and partly for Orlando's, to whom he wrote accounts of all he heard. For the rest, the quiet hours with his Goethe, Kant or Hegel were some of the most fruitful of his life.

As he looked back, the friar felt that even at this

period his thought had been already somewhat in advance of his age. Perhaps his intellectual sensibility had caused him speedily to recognise whatever new idea was "in the air." More especially his intuitional independence and mystic inclination had made him an eager rebel in the cause of spiritual insurgence against materialistic tyranny. He soon had learned to see in the "Reign of Law" a magnificent convention, a symbolic code erected by the human mind for the reduction of its environment to a workable medium for life and action. "Causality" had never been for him like a strait net wherein the Universe and his own will were ineluctably constrained. He had felt that the creative force in all was human thought, or God's thought working within men's minds. For, despite his abstinence from Catholic practice at this period, the sense of God was still as constantly present to his soul as the sunlight to his eyes.

III

The months went by quite uneventfully until the return of Otto from his military service. To celebrate the occasion Rudolf and Anselmo were expected to join the ex-recruit and several of his late comrades in a licensed orgy of beer-drinking. Rudolf, a heavy, pedantic youth, with whom Anselmo lived on terms of friendliness, not friendship, for several weeks had mystified him by jocular predictions of the great time they would enjoy. Even the parents in their material complacency seemed to expect some sort of licentious outbreak.

Otto turned out to be a swaggering, boisterous youth, who patronised his cousin and his elder brother with the air of a man of the world about to show them life. On the first Saturday evening after his return he took them to a drinking club which held its sittings in a large vaulted cellar, panelled and furnished with dark wood and decorated with curious mugs and monster tankards in coloured earthenware or pewter. There he presented Anselmo to the president and officers of the club and to a number of celebrities, such as the champion who held the record for the number of *Schöppen* he could drink, and the hero who had fought most duels with the small-sword. Almost all the members were disfigured by scars and seams upon their faces; one was hideous with half a nose, another had lost an ear with a long cut across his cheek, a third had his face still bandaged owing to the wounds of some more recent conflict. On their cropped heads the company wore bright-coloured caps and fezes with silk tassels dangling; they smoked long pipes with wooden stems and porcelain or meerschaum bowls.

For a short while they patronised Anselmo, quoting Goethe's praises of the beauty of his country; but discovered a reserve in him which struck them as proud and "ungemütlich," and an irresponsiveness to their keen interrogations as to his orgies and amours in Italy, "the land of love-making," as they proclaimed it in their toasts.

When the drinking began in earnest, Anselmo had to learn that there were intricate rules and an elaborate etiquette concerning the manner of it, the breaking of which involved such penalties as the obligation to drain

a tankard at one gulp. Meanwhile as they sat smoking with their elbows on the oaken tables, the students thundered out in deep but not untuneful voices songs, the words of which, where not obscene, appeared to the guest entirely devoid of meaning.

“In einem Baum ein Kuickuck,
Zimzalla dim Baum, zazalla du zalla dim!
In einem Baum ein Kuickuck
Sass!”

Anselmo, who had come unwillingly from politeness to Otto and the desire not to seem priggish, was soon so physically disgusted that no force of will could keep him longer in his seat. The heavy leering faces, hideous with scars, the poisonous atmosphere of tobacco, beer and packed humanity, above all the dull stupidity of the whole orgy seemed to him like an evil dream. Suddenly, to the fury and amazement of them all, he rose to his feet, bowed to the president and to the company and left the drinking hall. Probably only the fact that he was a foreigner saved him from an insult that would have forced a duel on him.

Reaching his uncle's flat, he thought that he would slip in quietly, in order to avoid an explanation; he tried his latchkey, but the door was bolted, the house lightless, the household asleep. It was only a little after midnight; the professor usually sat up much later in his study. Anselmo rang the bell and knocked; there was no answer; the parents had quietly gone to bed, since their sons were not expected, and not wanted, before morning; the night had been planned out with their connivance or consent. Anselmo turned upon his heel and went back into the streets.

Outraged and ashamed, he walked on steadily, out of the town and along the river bank beneath the stars. The fresh beauty of the night was exquisite to him after the foul and sordid atmosphere of the last hours. He walked mile after mile along the silence, poplars or willows on one side between him and the bordering fields, on the other the broad dark water slipping by with scarce a murmur, except round the bows of some black barge looming upon the stream. It was a night of crisis for Anselmo, when he vowed himself to purity in his strangely protracted and protected innocence that hardly knew temptation; a night when God seemed present everywhere about him and within him, and the mystic guidance in his soul was once more reinforced.

How delicate was the dawnlight over the dim country, the dawn-breeze in the shivering poplars and the pale gleams on the silver river! He reached a quiet country inn as it was opening at sunrise; he ate his breakfast ravenously and rested for some hours. In the afternoon he returned by a local steamer to the town.

Although they were obviously relieved at his return, he was received by the Kröner with icy disapproval. Perhaps they had feared that he would leave their house and cause a scandal, besides depriving them of the small weekly sum he paid for board and lodging. Perhaps they expected an angry scene and were prepared with their defence. At any rate, they would not let the matter rest in silence nor forgive him for the criticism, which they chose to see implied.

According to his agreement Anselmo stayed with the

house for three months longer, but the cordial relations were never re-established. The family treated him with cold politeness, reforming certain vulgar methods, as though suspicious of his criticism. During the last days of his stay they became demonstrative of more affection and probably afterwards agreed he was a nice youth — for a foreigner.

IV

Anselmo returned from Germany eager for the companionship of Vittoria and Orlando. During the last two months especially his longing and impatience had been growing more acute. His worldly prospects favourable, his salary increasing, the time was drawing nearer when he could think of marriage. His letters to Vittoria that for so long had been those of brother to sister or friend to friend were gradually infused with a new feeling; for love at last began to burst triumphantly through his temperamental reticence, since joy had purified and enlightened it. During the dark months following his father's death, his love had been false to its own divinity, had been obscured by the morbid exhaustion of his whole nature, but he knew now that the truth of the creative fire is made manifest in joy. He spent all his spare time during his last week in Germany choosing presents; he never passed a shop window or noticed anything attractive without saying to himself: "Would she like that?"


But it is the fate of all who live so keenly in the inward world to beggar reality by the lavishness of anticipation. Vittoria seemed a little scared by his

eagerness; her parents were friendly but evasive. With his entrance into his old rooms his spirits sank, and the old cloud swept upon him; his father's hours of lonely misery seemed to have soaked into the walls.

Once more he found his unmixed happiness in his friendship with Orlando, who had returned to Milan a fortnight before himself. Anselmo insisted on Orlando and Vittoria singing the new music he had brought with him from Germany, and as Vittoria could not now come to his rooms without her mother, musical evenings were arranged in the cousins' house. But Vittoria was now shy of singing with Orlando; when love duets from the Italian operas were asked for, each put them tacitly aside without glancing at the other.

Meanwhile the old weekly excursions were renewed by the whole party, and the three friends returned to their discussion of great themes. They talked of German music and its effect upon the soul; was the true music-god Dionysus or Apollo? They talked of Wagner and his theories, of Plato and Nietzsche; did God create the world apart or through mankind? They talked of Realism, Idealism and Catholic dogma; they quoted the poets and the mystics and lent each other books. Angelo and Pietro and their set did not understand such topics; so a natural tide of sympathy invariably drifted the three friends together.

One evening they were walking down the road from Brunate to catch the train at Como after a long day's ramble on the hills, Anselmo, as always, in the middle, Vittoria and Orlando on either side leading him to fresh fields of thought. The sun was setting behind



the far white peaks of Monte Rosa, while over the vast plain of Lombardy the violet shades were growing ever denser and blotting out Monza and far-distant Milan, discerned now only by their growing nebulae of light. Below them Como, with its brown Cathedral, was already bright with lamps, while to the right the shadowy lake, curving among the folded steepes, was shot with long reflected rays from twinkling villages that nestled on its shores. The pine forests above were like a tattered sable pall on the old bones of the mountains, whose peaks and ridges towered remote and infinitely lonely, beyond the gentler slopes and airy plateaux where each isolated shepherd's hut sent forth its tiny star.

They had been talking of Immortality and the Transmigration of Souls, which doctrine Orlando was fervently upholding.

"Give us another trial!" he cried, "us who have to think of our work, to fight our way, to live and marry, to beget and bring up children in order that this earth may be furnished with new vessels for new souls. How can we forsake the world, our wife or our children, for the Gospel's sake, as the monks do? By losing their lives some men may save their souls here and now, once and for ever, but give another chance to us, who live!"

"What is saving one's soul, I wonder," said Anselmo. "It often seems to me as though it were the carrying on by certain beings of the seeds of this world to another, the impregnating of new spheres with the spiritual vitality of this."

"For my part I can't conceive myself existing apart

from this warm solid earth," rejoined Orlando. "I shall have to be reincarnated many times in this world before I have enough of it. Whatever sorrow a man may have suffered, I can never understand how he can give up life."

"There seems to be a kind of spiritual aloofness and loneliness about certain mystic natures," said Vittoria. "It is just as though they were already half-detached from earth and gravitating towards higher worlds. The thought is wonderful, but oh! so cold; as cold as the idea of finding oneself now upon the snows of yonder peak!"

"Oh, Anselmo, Anselmo!" cried Orlando, impulsively flinging his arms on his friend's shoulders. "I fear my soul is sorely bound to earth compared with yours! And yet I am glad of it! Yes, I'm glad of it!"

Suddenly on the silence rang the far note of a bell, caught up and repeated in a thousand tones from plain, lakeshore and mountain, from the slow bass booming of the great Cathedral to the faint treble tinkle of the little hamlet towers. It was the Angelus. Around and above them rolled the sound-waves with their mingled hum, pierced by innumerable clear staccato notes ringing far over the deep water, held and re-echoed in the hollow windings of the hills. Like the gathering of the myriad lights, the harmony of countless bells was infinitely mysterious and wonderful, stilling the ripples of the transient thought and laying bare the still deeps of the soul.

The three friends crossed themselves and said the Ave; then when the sharp notes died out one by one

and the great wave ebbed slowly, they stood listening to the silence. The tide of sound and prayer encircles the whole earth and seems to bear the soul along with it.

At length from a boat upon the lake below them came the voice of singing, a simple ballad of a northern land, sung truly and sounding strangely sweet so far away. Vittoria's brothers and their friends called up to the laggards to walk faster, but still they lingered, wondering at something none of them could catch. An indefinable melancholy had fallen on them and it seemed to Anselmo that the other two were pitying him. Somehow he always felt himself to be older when he was with these two.

He felt as though there were something tragic, something withered in his young nature, like dead wood in a green tree. The others turned to him and said kind things, such as one might say to a friend who was ill or who was just going away. Orlando took his arm affectionately, and the girl laid her hand for a moment on his shoulder. Suddenly these two were embarrassed by each other's presence. A thrill of secret terror seemed to run through them all; or was it merely the chilly breath that follows the sun? They were all three standing still and staring at the same spot on the plain, yet none of the three saw anything. Their companions called to them again, but none of them took heed. Anselmo was the first to move and he glanced from one to the other. Orlando and Vittoria, smiling, looked at him together, and their smiles said: "How dear you are!" Then these two glanced at one another, their eyes meeting and their colour mount-

ing, for the blood in their hearts was crying passionately: "It is not he whom I love the most, but you, but you!"

Anselmo knew instantly what had happened. Something in the beauty of the evening had called up to consciousness that which had been slowly gathering in their souls. He knew that each of them was striving to stifle the new birth, was vowing that it should not, must not be. But he knew also that somehow they were both as certain as himself that it would be. A sickening sense of exile and rebellion surged within him, while they hurried down the road without a word or a glance at one another.

For days and nights, hope, longing and suspicion made in his heart a stormy darkness shot through with pangs of rage, revolt and jealousy. He doubted, watched and wondered, as every day confirmed his fears; while each of them endeavoured to avoid a meeting with the other, to elude his scrutiny and yet appear light-hearted as before. He noted the dark rings of sleeplessness under Vittoria's eyes, and the pale smile with which she put up her face for his kiss.

One day he held and pressed his cheek for a moment against hers. It was as cold and yielding as his own was feverish. She said nothing, but dropped her eyes and turned away.

"Oh, Vittoria, you do not love me!" he whispered in his misery.

"Oh, yes, I do! I do!" was all that she could answer.

He hardly saw Orlando in these days; there was always some trifling excuse for absence. There was

even something like hostility in his friend's eyes when they met his own. Thus for some weeks the little tragedy went on, each one of the three endeavouring to deceive the others and himself; but Anselmo suffered most, for he knew that it lay with him to act, to efface himself so as to leave as slight a scar as might be on the happiness of those whom he loved best.

It was to Dom Pietro Mariani that he turned for strength to make his sacrifice. He sought him out in his neat threadbare sacristy, with its ancient chestnut cupboards and its odour of faint incense and wax tapers snuffed. The old priest had grown very feeble with that frailty of saintly age, when it seems that the fleshly husk shrivels in order that the soul may slip the easier from its sheath. When Anselmo told his tale, full of bitter, passionate rebellion, the old man held the youth's hot hand awhile in his chilly, trembling fingers, looking pitifully at the misery depicted on his face:

"Ah! there are some that the Lord calls to Himself once and for ever," he answered, "so that they cannot forget or disobey. There are some whom the Lord calls to Himself so constantly that they grow too familiar with His voice to recognise His full intention with them. Therefore He must enforce His word by trials and temptations, by bitter pains and disappointments, which He sends them out of His most tender love. Believe me, it is all as He would have it; it is not possible that He will let you miss His way: "*Quicumque enim spiritu Dei aguntur, ei sunt filii Dei.*"

CHAPTER VIII

THE DECISION

I

THE edges of the patch of moonlight in the friar's cell had faded out into the grey of early dawn. The first low twitter of the waking birds had died again to silence, and now the chill that precedes the day breathed in through the window. The face of the world in sleep looked dead at the hour before its waking; each tree-trunk glimmered flat, unreal and shadowy, being almost shadowless. The friar rose from his chair and stretched his arms outwards as upon a cross, while his tall spare figure and his pale set face showed in a darker and a lighter tone against the ghost grey of the room. He plunged his hands over the wrists into a basin of water, visible now upon its iron stand in a corner of the cell, then taking down from a peg a cloak made of material similar to his habit, he cast himself upon the bed with his face towards the wall, drawing the garment over him. Above him hung a crucifix, a white figure on a black wooden cross; in the middle of the wall was pinned a photograph of a fourteenth century Madonna. Beside the bed a little table held a metal candle-stick, a carafe of water and a glass; above it was a cheap coloured calendar decorated with angels after Fra Angelico. At the foot of the bed

stood a plain *prie-dieu* with a small cross and two or three brown volumes. Next to the *prie-dieu* came the door. Beyond the door were shelves of books with a few drawers below them, and, further on, the row of pegs from which he had taken down the mantle. Then came the window with the little table in it, and through the window the cypresses swaying in the dawn.

The cell looked dim and ghostly in the first peep of twilight; but still within the friar's brain his feverish disquiet throbbed. Sleep had forsaken him.

II

He remembered how he had demanded a vacation from his office—so peremptorily that he almost lost his place. He gave up his flat, sold his furniture, warehoused his father's books and started to travel. Vittoria and Orlando accompanied him to the train. As he turned to say good-bye to her, she shivered and turned pale. In the last glance of her eyes there was a mute appeal, as though prophetically she realised what the parting meant for him, and was pleading with him to forgive her. When the train moved away and the tension of these last moments suddenly relaxed, he saw them standing together waving to him and wishing him Godspeed. It was thus he always saw them now.

He wandered listlessly round the galleries and churches of Bologna, Florence and Siena, his mind pre-occupied and his heart numb and empty. He went to Rome and took a small apartment in the Via Sistina. He had letters of introduction, but lacked the

courage to present them. He spent his days in gazing at the great monuments of the past, and filled his letters to Vittoria and Orlando with detailed descriptions of what he saw. He passed many hours reading history. Hitherto he had cared but little for men's actions; he used to say it was only their thoughts that mattered, for by their thoughts they had built our thoughts, our world. But now he was very weary of the clash of philosophic systems. He longed for something sure and certain; yet it was not "truth" he asked for now so much as something to believe. He was tired of thinking round and round and tired of seeking. He drugged his mind with that glamorous reconstruction of dead worlds which is the great historical illusion.

In his hours of revolt he hugged his griefs, wringing a miserable pleasure from them. He felt that his whole world was wrecked, his faith, his hope, his heart. He did not know what he thought or what he believed, and he did not care to know. He saw, without feeling, the beauty of the ancient sculptures, he made notes, like a reporter, for his letters. The only thing he really felt in the galleries was irritation with the chattering crowd of tourists, who cheapened the power of high feeling by borrowed gush of false enthusiasm. In the streets he only saw vast piles of stucco or of marble, purposeless and pretentious, the fit expression of an age that feels the need of blatantly proclaiming its ideals in order to believe them. In the newspapers he read of the petty men of party politics in court and council, spitting the venom of their personal quarrels at venerable sanctities they were too paltry in

themselves to understand. In the churches he found only the cold external symbols of a creed that seemed for ever self-defensive, suspicious of attack, as though at heart in doubt of its own divine invincibility.


All day long in all he saw he emphasised the evidence of his utter disillusionment. At night he would walk about the streets and look hungrily at the merry parties of friends in the brightly lighted cafés. Then his flesh would yearn for mere physical companionship, for the mutual yielding up of one human being to another. He went through a period of physical struggle with gross temptations and loathed himself for it. The ideal love which had kept him pure was now but misery to think upon. "*In quo correxit viam suam juvenis? In custodiendo sermones tuos.*" But the mystic voice in his heart was silent, and gave no answering assent to the sacred words.

He could not sleep. Hour after hour with his flesh aflame he would toss and strive to baffle with all the strength of his will the throng of poisoned thoughts that surged into his mind by almost every roadway of association. Time after time he fled them down the tortuous ways of his imagination, only to find the ghost of an almost forgotten moment of temptation lying in wait for him. There were hours when every lane and alley of his mind seemed to lead but to the madhouse or the brothel. With tireless ruses hordes of devils tricked and hunted, luring him into quagmires from which he rose defiled. In actual temptations his defence lay partly in his shyness and physical reserve; but these availed him nothing in the nightly battles with his unembodied foes.

At length in the dawn, weary and feverish, he would plunge his head and hands or his whole body into ice-cold water, and fall asleep as the first bells rang for Mass. But his sleep too was poisoned; after but an hour of rest, some monstrous dream would rouse him and the struggle with his waking thoughts, inflamed by its suggestion, would begin again. At last he would dress and go out into the streets, and, after drinking a small cup of black coffee in a restaurant, walk for miles and miles into the Campagna until the hour when the galleries were opened.

Mental temptations such as these come on the soul through spiritual depression. Anselmo's flesh cried out: why does God give me such desires and then forbid their satisfaction? The gentle voice of religious consolation only seemed to weaken his will; it was now that the Hellenic thought quickened and braced him. Study of Roman history had led him to Marcus Aurelius and thus thrown him back upon the Greek philosophers. They pointed to the diamond heights of intellectual beauty, bidding him battle to be free and not subject to desire. They readjusted the moral balance, not by claiming his submission, but by stiffening his pride. For a while he found a stronger spiritual tonic in Plato than St. Paul; that, reaching him through the intellect when the religious sense was numb, brought his love of beauty to the rescue of beleaguered conscience.

"An object of desire comes in sight. Wait, poor soul, do not be carried straightway off thy feet! Consider, the contest is great, the task is divine; it is for



kingship, for freedom, for calm, for undisturbedness. Think of God, call Him to be your helper, as sailors call on Castor and Pollux in a storm. For yours is a storm, the greatest of all storms, the storm of strong suggestions that sweep the mind away." Thus Epictetus braced him to a proud self-exile and renouncement, endowing him with new courage in this dark hour of his life.

One evening in the dusk as he was passing down a narrow street in the Trastevere, he looked into an old church with some vague idea of making sure whether it was one that he had already visited. It was quite dark and empty. He walked half-way down the nave, and turned round to go out, when he was startled by a voice close by him saying: "What are you looking for?"

"I don't know," he answered bitterly, "perhaps hope or peace, what you will."

There was a pause, and the little figure of an old priest came out from the shadow of a chapel and approached him. "No," said the figure, "you don't know. I will tell you. You think that it is peace or hope or happiness that you are looking for. But all the while what you really lack is God."

"Perhaps," he answered wistfully, "but how does one get to Him?"


"The only way I know is by making His will your own." The little priest shuffled away to his dark sacristy and disappeared.

Anselmo never saw his face, nor knew his name, but since then he had said many a prayer for him.

III

Nevertheless it was yet many months before his way was clear to him and his great decision taken. Urged by the restless energy of suffering, he started for Naples with a light travelling outfit, leaving his heavy luggage and his books in Rome. He examined the rich galleries of ancient treasures with a fresh intensity of study; he made expeditions to Pompeii, Capri, Posilippo, Paestum, his pockets filled with notebooks and guide-books. With sudden decision he took ship for Greece, his mood in part a proud, stoical renunciation, in part Byronic vanity of grief. Had there been raging at that time some war of liberation he would have hastened to the ends of the earth to lay down his life in the cause. At night he paced the moonlit deck, dreaming that he would experience all that of which Orlando, Vittoria and he had read and dreamed; in which resolve he utterly misunderstood his nature; his skin lacked the toughness and his mind the buoyancy for a life of action, hardship and adventure. He had not even the capacity for making friends among his travelling companions; solitary, he read his Plato, watched the sea-line, buoyed on the frailest of illusions.

The swarming touts and squalid clamour of the Piræus were the first shock to his dream. Despite the tragic splendour of the Parthenon,—by noonday, sunset, moonlight; despite the galleries, the lustrous air and peacock-coloured sea; despite the gorgeous after-glow upon Hymettus and Pentelicon, this vain and pleasant modern city afforded him small solace for his




needs. He put himself into the hands of a Greek travelling agent, who arranged long tours for him and profited no little from his restless inexperience. He coasted between violet-shadowed mountains, wooded inlets and majestic headlands to the wide, barren, thistle-bearing plains of Thessaly. He traversed Tempé's far-famed gorge, with its lofty dove-grey crags like giant castles clothed with dense aromatic verdure. He climbed by swinging ladders up to filthy eyrie monasteries, perched upon inaccessible peaks of naked rock that rise like mighty teeth into the air. He thridded the mysterious streets, the gorgeous twilit labyrinth of Stamboul's bazaars, lingered in many a spacious and cool-tinted mosque or cleft in arrowing caique the teeming waters of the Golden Horn.

From the summit of the Acrocorinth, encumbered with the mingled wreckage of all ages — of Pagan temples, Frankish castles, Venetian battlements and Turkish mosques — he watched a crimson sun-rise over the violet-isled Ægean, with the glimmering scimitar of the Corinthian Gulf laid deep amid azure shores to westward, and encircled by a thousand cloudless peaks and ridges; at Delphi he wandered amid mountain ruins and heard by night redoubled thunders tossed from the sheer Phædræan cliffs; at Olympia he studied the exquisite relic of the Hermes and stared in gloomy wonder at the amazing temples in their still more amazing overthrow. Thence with a horse and a local guide he wound all day by the rocky tracks and flower-starred water-courses of Arcadia, eating at noon in the shadow of some isolated carrib-tree, sleeping by night in peasant cottages, till he reached that loveliest and

loneliest of temples, the Apolline Parthenon that is still intact upon the lofty mountain pass of Bassæ. He climbed to Sparta by the wild Langada gorge across Taygetus and walked in strange deserted streets amid the painted domes and roofless palaces of Mistra; at Epidaurus he saw the wondrous theatre, precinct and Tholos of the Serpent God; at Tiryns and Mycenæ the Cyclopean houses and rifled golden tombs of the Atridæ.

From place to place he hurried, flying vainly from his shadow, in passionate thirst of self-forgetfulness that intensified self-fear. Not daring to think about the future, lest he should brood upon the past, by restless movement he achieved an objectivity of attitude wherein his conscious mind became a mere recording page of changing externality. He tried to soothe his heart by delicately fingering the exquisite curves and surfaces of some cold marble relic; he endeavoured to shelter his soul within the gleaming shrine of philosophic beauty, notwithstanding that each broken shaft, erect amid the flowering waste, reminded him of the impotence of an impersonal faith to save mankind alike from civil anarchy or moral dissolution. At evening he would climb to the summit of some cliff or hill to gaze across the rock-strewn sites of immemorial cities and to tell himself in view of the eternal pageant of vicissitude how insignificant was his own grief, albeit well knowing that the circle of his brooding soul contained all life and all eternity — for him. The pride of spiritual isolation, that he was slowly gaining, was making the definite renunciation of Vittoria to Orlando possible, but not less bitter; the pes-



simistic fatalism, that grew with it, was congealing the deep springs of vital energy and material ambition.

Now, nearly eight years later, he recognised how vain and desperate had been for him that blind pursuit of peace through sunlit precincts of material loveliness, wherein he had only found a quickened sensibility and a heightened power of suffering. No sacrament of beauty would unite his soul in life-giving eucharist with the sanity and splendour of the world; he needed the deeper and more intimate communion of suffering love and purging sacrifice. His pain demanded not philosophy, but reconciliation; not flattery of the reason or the senses, but self-denial, self-abasement, prayer. Looking back upon these crowded months of memory, the friar felt that all the while he had been dogged by the emissaries of some Fate or Power which he had refused to heed. Deep in his heart lay, unacknowledged, unregarded, the thought that he would give up all for the religious life. He had dreamed that he was flying from remembrance; had he not rather been flying from his God?

One incident above the rest stood out most vividly in his remembrance — his visit to a hermit dwelling on the summit of Ithomé. The site of the hermitage was as solitary as man could well conceive; nearly two thousand feet of rocky slope, thickset with thorny acacia scrub, isolated it from the small village built at the mountain foot on the foundations of the once populous city of Messené. Some ruinous towers of cyclopean masonry had supplied a quarry for the rude materials of habitation; an ancient fortress well, a tiny

plot of vegetables, with the occasional visits of bands of nomad goatherds, furnished the bare necessities of life. Dressed in a habit of sackcloth reaching to his naked ankles, with streaming hair and beard unkempt, the anchorite appeared a veritable reincarnation of the ancient seers of the Thebaid. He stared at the foreign youth in rapturous amazement, and on hearing that he came from Italy fell straightway into the delusion that the motive for his journey was the fame of his own holiness. Ceremoniously ushering him into his small dwelling he set before him the resources of his store — a broken portion of a large loaf of bread, black, dry, and hard as stone, a drop of wine in the bottom of a bottle, dark-brown, opaque and viscous. Anselmo could touch neither, howbeit to satisfy his host he tasted an unripe bitter almond with a sip of water from the well, after which the hermit led him to his tiny oratory and knelt down before a low stone altar adorned with a white-metal eikon of the Virgin.

In stammering Greek Anselmo asked him what had constrained him to this mode of life? It was certainly not his choice, the hermit answered, nor was it penitence for any special sin. It was not hatred of the world, nor fear of the world's hatred or contamination.

"What was the cause?" the youth persisted.

The old man pointed upwards solemnly. "The will of God," he said. "Until I came here I wandered over all the world, finding no rest; but here for seventeen years I am at peace. It is hard for one to kick against the goads."

Anselmo shivered on the barren mountain summit




that was stricken by the shadeless noonday. "The Will of God" was a phrase that perpetually startled him. The anchorite must be insane, he thought; could God's will be a Force so fearful as to constrain His creature to a life like this? Yet the thought of that strange quotation haunted him; it is hard indeed for the ox of God to kick against His goads.

IV

At length Anselmo grew to realise that in this flight from place to place he was living on his capital, spiritual and material. A letter from his banker warned him of the latter; of the former he was but too conscious in his loneliness. He took ship to Ancona and went directly to Assisi.

Climbing up in the slow diligence the winding road between the vineyards and the olive orchards, looking up at the brown and golden walls, the towered gates and glowing Campinili, and down on the ever-widening quiet of the plain, he felt that in this sunset there was nothing for him of melancholy, for it suggested not the passing away of empires and of creeds, but the everlasting vision and benison of saints. Greece spoke to him of the vanity of intellectual ideals; Rome of the hollowness of the material shell, of pomp and pride and death; Assisi of the faith and spirit in the dogma, the prophecy of life within the dream. For if Athens is her eye and Rome the crowned brow and brain, Assisi represents the mystic heart.

He felt this peace grow deeper as he passed each little wayside shrine where the Virgin's face smiles out




with tender Umbrian eyes; and again as he entered through the battlemented gate into the steep mediæval street. The impression of saintly isolation struck him anew as he leaned out from his high balcony over the dark immensity of happy lands asleep and heard the clocks chime solemnly the watches of the night.

Wandering the next day on the hills, he thought that here the sunshine lingered with a holier benediction than elsewhere. He marked with joy the kindness and the devotion of the people; they seemed to him, despite their poverty, the fortunate children of a divinely enchanted land.

By the close of his second day he so loved the place that he longed to make his home in it. At the same time the thought of the religious life came insistently into his mind. At the instant that he realised whither Christ was leading him, he rushed towards the goal with an almost delirious joy. The mystic spring within his soul, which had been so long congealed, burst forth and overflowed its cup, clothing the desert of his life with verdure.

The words of his old confessor came back to him with ever fresh intensity: "There are some whom the Lord calls to Himself so constantly that they grow too familiar with His voice to recognise His full intention. Therefore He must enforce His word by bitter pains and disappointments. It is not possible that He will let you miss His way." From his earliest youth he had been led astray by intellectual ambitions; now he was humbled and his eyes were opened. There was only one way henceforth for him, as there had been from the beginning, had he but perceived it.



The solution of his earthly problem was so simple. He could not marry Vittoria since she loved Orlando, and to live without her in the world would be to live with an ever aching void that would make vanity of all success. To Christ alone he could make the renunciation, not only without envy, but with joy. He would surrender his earthly passion for a woman and fill its place in his heart with the greatest and intensest love of all, the love for God. Then Vittoria and Orlando could accept their happiness, and not see his ghost between them at their wedding feast. To them and to his family his decision would not seem unnatural; had not Angelo and Pietro often cried: "Don't think you'll ever marry him, Vittoria! Can't you already see the tonsure on his head?"

He spent many hours in the Lower Church. Above all others he loved the four great frescoes over the High Altar, where the chief Franciscan virtues hold, as it were, a court about the Saint in glory. On his right in a little cloister sit Obedience, Prudence and Humility, the last with a taper in her hand, since it is only to the lowly that is given the guiding light. To her Anselmo offered all his sleepless nights of study and his intellectual pride.

Opposite to these the Lady Chastity kneels in her ivory tower, reading a book an angel brings her, which is the vision of the pure in heart. She also has a taper and her bell for vigilance. To her Anselmo offered his unpurged desires, his pangs of bitter jealousy, his throes of restless longing. He prayed her to bid her knights endue him too with the white-pennoned lance of purity and the shield of resolution.

Between these, opposite the saint, is the picture of his marriage with his Lady Poverty, of whom Dante said that she mounted the cross with Christ when even the Blessed Mother stayed below. Hope and Charity are her bridesmaids, the one pointing upward, the other bearing in her hand a crimson heart, being crowned with flowers that break into thin flames. Dogs bark at her and children mock her, pressing into her flesh with rods the thorns which tear her robe. It seems as if she half draws back in pity for the hardships that her married yoke will bring her lover. To her Anselmo gave all the dreams of his ambition, begging only in return one lily from the sheaf that blooms behind her by the gates of Paradise.

In the central fresco, gloriously robed, enthroned upon the royal seat that Lucifer lost for pride, sits the Seraphic Father, while around him sways a choir of singing angels. To him Anselmo gave his all, his life.

CHAPTER IX

DISILLUSIONMENT


I

To the Franciscan looking back across the intervening years within the Order, his state of mind during the weeks of crisis before entering it were the most difficult to conceive of all his life. From the first moment of his decision it had seemed to him as though he had at length surrendered to the constant pressure of some spiritual influence against which he had been holding out for months and even years. He had believed that by his own divided will he had been constantly protracting the struggle that was torture. It came upon him irresistibly that God had called him in his boyhood, but that in his intellectual pride he had refused to hear. He had been led away against the better understanding of his heart by the lure of atheist philosophies, which had left him desolate and disillusioned in his hour of need. His bitter sufferings and disappointment had been the penalty and the purgation. Thus God had enforced His call and beaten him down to his knees, that he might fly from Him no more. He not only thought this, he felt it incontrovertibly, as through his whole being passed a sigh of infinite relief. The protracted strife was over, and the last bar-

riers had given way. It was only by the exceeding lightness of that moment that he realised how heavy had been the hand upon his life.

Upon his third night in Assisi as the full moon rose into a cloudless sky, Anselmo wandered out from his hotel into the sleeping streets, that were almost unlighted save for the little lamps that twinkled mistily before the wayside shrines. On one side lay the full sheet of the moonlight, golden upon the rosy-brown of the ancient stones; on the other hung the blue-grey shadow that sharply struck across the grey-white paving, with ink-black chasms and sombre arches leading into depths of darkness. Loitering in moonlit spaces, he listened to the silence, broken only by some fountain tinkling into its ancient trough; then an owl would hoot from some church tower, a dog bark far across the plain, or a bell strike suddenly and die upon the air. He stood before the broad west front of the Cathedral, that loomed black beside its lofty tower with the rising moon behind it; he gazed for a few minutes at the statue of St. Francis bending so tenderly and humbly towards the town. His heart was filled with peace at last; he thought he was supremely rich in having all the beauty of the city and the night to himself. Loth to resign an hour of what seemed so precious, he followed the road towards the Gate of the Capuchins, and so out and up on to the hill.

He felt a joyous longing to climb and climb, as though thus he should mount nearer to God. There seemed a vast symbolical significance in his action, as if by it he clinched the resolution he had formed.



Henceforth he would suffer no lesser aim to lure him; he would consecrate his life to the attainment of spiritual beauty. He mounted up the rocky steep breathlessly but in rapture, at every pause he turned and hailed the glory of the widening view. He left the winding path, led only by the height above him; at length he thought he neared the crest, but it was only the brow of an outer, lower peak.

Before him stretched a vast plateau, miles upon miles, it seemed, of barren rolling downs, with here and there a coppice of young trees nestling among the shadows of a rise, a sudden hollow with a spring, a shallow pool or marsh. Alternately he walked and ran, holding back his emotion in his heart, till overcome with longing he threw himself on his knees upon the dewy grass. The hours of that night were for him as one long rosary with links of rapid movement and shining beads of brief but intensest prayer. At one moment he shed tears of gladness; at another tears of passionate remorse that he had held out so long against his beloved Master. The earliest twilight found him kneeling in the broad horse-shoe valley that lies, utterly lonely, beneath the highest ridge of all, bright with myriad orchids, purple, white and golden, with cowslips, cyclamen and infinite, minutely exquisite flowers he could not name. Here as in a secret, angel-haunted sanctuary, wrapt in the perfect silence of the dawn, he caught a transient, rapturous glimpse of the "Uncreated Light," in a mystic experience, indelible, howbeit indefinable, that inexpressibly enhanced the significance of life.

II

That moment was the culmination of the exalted mood that had been growing on him since his arrival in Assisi; his action during the ensuing weeks was governed by its control. For upwards of an hour he lay still, as though bathed in ecstasy; afterwards breasting up the last slope into the sunrise, he poured forth his thanksgiving in view of all the snowy Apennines. Hastening down the mountain he made his communion that same morning at the tomb of St. Francis and after breaking his long fast rested for some hours.

That same evening he visited San Damiano, feeling like one who goes to see his future home. Father Girolamo took him round the buildings, telling the sacred stories as to any casual visitor. Anselmo rejoiced in his genial happiness of manner, as one might rejoice in the charm of an earthly brother one has never known. He showed him the relics, so poor and yet so precious; the cord of St. Francis and a small piece of his habit; the loaves of bread imprinted with the cross by the benediction of St. Clare; her Breviary; the bell with which she used to call her sisters; the pyx in which she held out the sacred Host that put the storming Saracen to flight. He led him for the first time through the little choir, which since he knew so well, and up into her small roof garden where between her rosemary and basil pots she could look down towards the "Little Portion," where Brother Francis dwelt. The whole building seemed to be saturated with the spell of her sweet presence;

Anselmo trod in her steps as in a dream, his eyes filled with tears. As he knelt for the first time in the time-blackened chapel, a voice in his heart repeated with its throb: "*Hic est locus tuus! Hic est locus tuus!*"

He needed the complete and absolute break with his old self and his old world; no seclusion in a rich or learned convent would suffice to quench his passion of renouncement. He could not give up half his life, this was just the burden of his struggle; he must give all or nothing, he must yield himself, his mind, his flesh, his tastes, his worldly hopes without reserve.

Girolamo had marvelled at his mute intensity of feeling, and his heart had gone out to him in pity and affection. As Anselmo knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, the friar had retreated into the shadow of the wall and had added the force of his prayers that the youth might be led unto peace. That hour had forged a secret bond between them like the union of a spiritual parentage. After a while, when Anselmo rose from his knees, they had gone out together into the convent garden, where, sitting by the little tank, Anselmo had first spoken of his desire.

"Would you take me here among you?" he had asked in a voice that trembled. "If you only knew how I long to stay!"

But Girolamo had not understood him. How often had he told the tale since then! "If the signorino wishes for a room with us for a few days, there is a cell vacant in the hostel, but it is a very small one. You might ask the Father Guardian for it."

"That is not what I mean. I mean with you, of you, for ever. I wish to enter the Order."

Girolamo stared at him in amazement: "But I thought you came here only as a visitor. How long have you had this in your heart?"

"For all my life, I think; but I have only lately listened to the call. I have been so miserable, so unhappy in the world," he burst out, "but at last I am at peace."

"But unhappiness in the world is no good reason for leaving it," said Girolamo gently, taking the young man's hand in his and patting it tenderly. "We should come to God with joy, bringing our earthly happiness as a wedding gift."

"But the world is all so sad," whispered Anselmo. He had had no one he could tell of his sorrow for so long that now he could hardly keep back his tears.

"No, I don't think it is all so sad," answered Girolamo. "But we think of many things sadly, that is, without faith. The faithlessness is in us, and then we say the world is sad, and we don't see how mercifully the Lord is leading men to Himself by their afflictions."

"Yes, yes! That is just it!" cried Anselmo. "I was worldly and ambitious, but He has broken down my pride and now after many wanderings He has shown me the way."

Leaving a letter for the Guardian, he returned to his hotel in the twilight.

III

After this he hardly knew how it all happened. He acted as one in a dream. He had no doubt then of his vocation, or, if he had, he hid it from himself. Looking back he felt that the strongest proof of its reality was that during these decisive weeks he had known no single hour of hesitation. His director seemed to sift his motives needlessly, to raise fears and problems of which he had not dreamed. All their precautions appeared shallow and futile to his ardour; he had borne them over almost indignantlly, and for weeks he had only one prayer, that he might not be rejected. He had stayed a month in the convent before he made his formal demand.

Then had come the final meeting with Orlando, painful to both, but necessary. At his urgent request they met in Florence and one night they walked up and down the Lung' Arno between the weir and the Cascine gates. Anselmo spoke with a firmness which seemed hard and cold by reason of the struggle which it covered. He knew that Orlando did not approve of the religious life. He could not speak of it, he shrank from opening his heart; and seeing his future with new eyes, the prospect looked bleak and lonely in this hour. From time to time he felt a bitter pang of jealousy stab through him and the aching of old hopes that re-awakened at this contact with the world. He contented himself with extracting an acknowledgment of Orlando's love for Vittoria and of the tacit understanding between them. At the moment he even felt as though he were a man condemned by

tragic destiny, for the mystic joy in his heart was numb as he made the act of renunciation. He had had his letter to Vittoria ready in his pocket and had posted it quietly before they re-entered the hotel. In it he simply told her of his love for Christ, and how it had been revealed to him in Assisi, that there was his place and this the manner of his future life.

When they reached the brightly lighted hall of the hotel he saw that tears were in Orlando's eyes, but he could not relax his hold on his own feelings. He shut himself into his room, wrote a few words of good-bye and left the hotel before his friend awoke in the morning. But Orlando followed him, and reached the station just in time to exchange one glance before the train steamed out. In it Anselmo read the same appeal for pardon that he had seen in Vittoria's eyes when he left Milan, mingled with a strange passionate wonder as though the vision of some new world had opened to Orlando which he could not understand.

IV

Since then, seven years! His postulancy, novitiate, profession, ordination, with various courses of study—short periods at other convents, a year at "the Angels," some months at Amelia—classes and graduations at each step. At first the lesser struggle in the outer rings of life; small nervous fits of irritation and rebellion against the monotony, discipline and restraint; the regularity, enforced, as it often seemed, without reason; the cramping smallness of the rooms,

the roughness of food, the lack of refinement in the manners of some of his companions; the galling of the yoke of Our Lady Poverty, the chafing of the halter of Our Lady Obedience.

He had conquered his fastidiousness by fasting. More than once during these first years he had fainted in choir; for a while he had imperilled his health and even his chance of admission to the Order. He had not given his life to Christ in order to keep his soul fettered to the flesh. Forbidden to fast, he had redoubled his abstinence and secret mortifications until tastes or distastes in external things no longer existed for him.

Then came the far more serious struggle in the intellectual sphere; impatience at the narrowness of some of his teachers, at their contempt for other religious systems and ideals which they did not understand; irritation at the scholastic realism of Aquinas and Scotus with their interminable commentators; at logic divorced from psychology and both from life; at the confusion of appearance and reality; at the view of the world as a mosaic composed of little rigid squares untrue to the real impression: at the delusion of a false and rigid finality which is only secured by being cut off from the growing, living truth; at the complacent acquiescence of ignorance in much that seemed to him vapid and puerile; at intellectual apathy and sterility consequent upon dogmatic isolation;— the fretting of the bridle of Our Lady Humility.

He had subjugated his intellectual vanity by studied self-humiliation. Whenever he was alone and disposed to criticise, he set himself tasks, long passages

of the Bible and the Fathers to learn by heart. He had abandoned all philosophy because it endangered his intellectual faith; he had done violence to the natural bent of his mind. He had worked in the garden with the peasants and scrubbed the floor of his cell and the corridor. Whenever he was tempted to remit some minor mortification as paltry, he doubled it in order to humble the pride that despised any act soever that might possibly quicken the eyes of his soul. He had had a long and a bitter fight, but his will by God's aid had conquered.

There had come to his succour a growing love for the beautiful office and the æsthetic simplicity of a life of prayer and meditation, the friendship of so many simple-hearted and kindly comrades, the deep devotion for one or two of truly saintly life. Later on, after his ordination, there had been added a paternal affection for his penitents; a love of his work of help, enlightenment and consolation; the variation of his little journeys through neighbouring villages to preach; a sense of being in touch with the inward life of the toiling poor, with the real, the elemental motives of primitive humanity; and more recently the interest in the historical subject of his book.

In the inner well of his mystic life there had been many rapturous hours of "illumination" with occasional reactions — fits of dryness and dissatisfaction, becoming year by year less frequent — an ever more vivid realisation of God's Presence, together with a growing peace, an expanding charity and the sense that he was fulfilling by his present work the higher purpose of his Maker's praise. Steadily thus he had

pursued his long road of Purgation, while slowly he had built up his new world.

V

Seven years of letters from Vittoria and Orlando; — he had kept them all, tied up in little packages; an almost daily record of their lives. The disturbance in his heart, which they at first created, was at length succeeded by a sense of spiritual fatherhood. The surmounting of the obstacles to their betrothal, Orlando's first successes, his début as an opera singer at the Scala, the enthusiastic notices in the press, the portraits, the comments on his charm and popularity, how proud he had been of them all! Then the tours and engagements in foreign capitals, more triumphs and more appreciation,— they were all in the records under his hand. At length came the great day of the wedding, and afterwards joint letters from them on their travels; picture postcards from foreign cities; long descriptions from Vittoria of all that they did and saw. They asked his advice at every crisis, recounting all their plans and little problems. He felt that they did not always understand the gravity of their decisions, but often acted as inconsequently as children in matters to his judgment fraught with far-reaching import for their happiness, concerning which he cared far more than they. With prayer for guidance he thought out their problems, answering each in detail, only to find that they had solved themselves and were even forgotten, long before his counsel had arrived.

Their letters were his window into the wider world, and the scene he saw through it was bathed in sunshine. After a tour of several months through the chief cities of northern Europe they hinted at the reason of their return to Milan. The firstborn was to be his godchild; if a boy its name would be Anselmo.

Now Orlando had left his wife for a few days only in order to pay him his long-promised visit in Assisi. At the first moment of their meeting a whole fragment of Bernardo's world had fallen out, leaving a gap of chaos and a tumult of disordered feelings. He fitted his friend's memory portrait and the picture of his life, constructed from his letters, so easily into the fabric he had woven round his soul. But not so the true Orlando. It was not that he was changed, for Bernardo recognised each trick of thought and manner, but he saw that the years had attenuated the image in his memory to a phantom, whereas the real man was more vital than before. In the past, he, Anselmo, had been the leader and master of the younger and more impressionable mind. Orlando had been subdued by that kind of moral force which exacts the reverence of more animal men, even if they do not understand it.

With the first word exchanged the phantom vanished, and Bernardo was set at a disadvantage for all the love he had bestowed upon it. He saw that Orlando's life had been humanly so much richer than his own, that his mind was far more vivid and alert. There was a mobility and freshness in his thought that made Bernardo feel as though he had been seven years asleep. All the little things he had wished to

say to him were frozen on his lips and but for Orlando's flow of genial talk, their intercourse would have been difficult. Orlando could not stand within Bernardo's house except by lowering his head; he led him out under the skies that were quick with light and wind.

Thus it was that in Bernardo's heart, after so many years of sleep, the old self leapt to resurrection and stood in judgment on his present world. It said to him that if his vision of life differed from that of the majority of his contemporaries, the cause must lie in difference of temperament and education, in some unusual suppression or development of his natural instincts. The dominance of his father's personality over his childish mind and the loneliness of his boyhood had starved the instinctive love of play and laughter, stimulating his habits of solitary thought. Ideas of mediæval mysticism had been implanted in him when the instinct of imitation was most active. Other boys had been playing at soldiers or romping together while he had been listening to stories of the saints or dreaming that he was a hermit. By his exultations and his fears alike he had been thrust towards religion. Later on, struggle, sorrow and disappointment had blighted the growth of his material ambition. The loss of Vittoria and the separation from his friend had driven his yearning for sympathy into the sole channel that was open to it. During the lonely months of travel, when he had forsaken the practice of his faith, he had been constantly suggesting to his own mind the thought of his vocation by consciously baffling and denying it. Thus the new

voice told him that he was what he was, not necessarily by any calling on God's part, but by the force and interaction of ideas sown and nourished in his mind by outward circumstances. It asked: was not the sense of his vocation merely the uprising into consciousness of some possessing thought, fostered by the unnatural conditions of his bringing-up, and the joy and relief with which he had yielded after months of miserable vacillation, due to the sudden relaxation of an artificial mood of fear and strain?

This second self now risen into life looked on the vision of the religious self as an illusion. The thought that he could not live and fight in the world without Vittoria's love was now absurd. In a sense he loved her still, of course, but he knew he could live without her. The blinding pain which had blotted out the world to him had passed away, and the old instincts in his mind revived. Their cry for life was the nostalgia that was aching in him, the old impatience with narrowness of thought, the old distrust of prejudiced tradition, the old dislike of by-paths, all that was not central to man's life. There were moments in his discussions with Orlando when he realised that he was now uttering ideas and phrases that he would have rejected as hollow seven years ago. He was using logical instead of living reasons, deducing from abstract definitions devoid of actual significance. Often what Orlando said more truly represented his own thought. He knew that he had been unconsciously assuming a mental tone not natural to him, and looking around him he saw his world as with new eyes. It was as though he had seen it hitherto trans-

figured by the gleam of an illusion that had vanished.

He saw himself, a son of the end of the nineteenth century, bound by his vows to a vision and mode of life that belonged to six centuries before. On his shelves were gathered the thoughts of that dead world; on the table was the expression of his own thoughts based on these. He was dressed in a habit cut after the fashion in which men dressed in those distant days; he was shut in a building whose white-washed walls were practically as old. Outside were the fields of corn that the spring renewed year by year. Beyond the hills were great cities swept by the river of human thought with waves that were never the same, whose fiercer floods bore down great logs that remained for ages in the sluggish backwaters, where the current of life ran weak. Was the convent only a relic of a spent tide of feeling? Had he cast his soul into a dead channel? Or was the ideal which he had chosen true and living for him yet?

VI

The bell for prime broke suddenly upon the morning silence. The sunrise streaming from behind Subasio already bathed the distant hills with gold. Low ranks of mist stretched like an inland sea across the valley from the violet range to the golden range under a faint blue sky.

The bell rang on insistently with thin clear note. Bernardo heard the creak of the rope, the whirl of the wheel and the clang above him in the air. The

bell seemed to cry "Illusions! Illusions! Illusions!" — He remembered; it was the festival of the Holy Cross, on which the sanctity of their own miraculous crucifix was celebrated. Orlando was coming to the High Mass at half-past ten and staying afterwards to dine in the refectory. In the afternoon they would talk and walk together. The next day Orlando was to go away; and then day after day, month after month, year after year, *he* would rebuild the temple of his peace; cutting down his desires and aspirations to the small world of the convent, his penitents and his history of the Order.

He leaped suddenly from his bed in an access of misery. The bell added emphasis to the agitation of his nerves. He stretched out his arms again with the same gesture as when he had thrown himself down in the dawn. Then he fell upon his knees. He prayed for peace, for the obliteration of these doubts of God's intention in himself. For peace? Had he not given up the fight seven years before in cowardice and renounced his truth, to obtain a false peace by creeping into a borrowed shell of thought, which for others might be natural and living, but which for him was dead and only true so long as he refused to look outside it?

What gift had he brought with him? Where others came in the power of faith and wealth of life, he had come only in his morbid disillusion. He had cast aside money, position and education simply because he had not strength to use them. No, not for peace now, but for war and pain, for fire to fuse and force to weld his conflicting worlds to unity!

The bell ceased; the fit of frenzy passed away. Bernardo rose from his knees, and taking off his habit and his woollen clothes poured the cold water over all his body. Then he dressed and went down into the choir of the little convent chapel.



PART II

THE RENDING OF VEILS

"Truly that man is blest whom Thou dost prevent so lovingly that Thou lettest him nowhere have rest, until he seek his rest in Thee alone."

—*Suso, "Eternal Wisdom."*



CHAPTER I

THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL

I

ORLANDO BERARDESCA set forth early from the Hotel Subasio to walk to the Convent of San Damiano. Having lived of late in great cities the freshness of the open country had an irresistible charm for him. Accordingly he engaged a peasant boy to guide him by the cross paths through the fields.

As he passed out of the high battlemented gate, the sea of mist, which had veiled the broad Umbrian valley in the dawn, was gradually breaking and ascending under the growing power of the sun. The distant hills shone clear in delicate successive tones from gentian blue to lavender, and the figured carpet of the green and purple plain — seamed with its straight white roads, rent by one ragged tear where the Tescio winds in its wide bed of shingle — was flecked with a thousand stealing shadows as the cloudlets drifted upwards and dissolved.

The swallows were wheeling round the towers and campanili, and small birds were twittering on the boughs and in the air. To Orlando's joyous fancy as he gazed over the laughing sunlit corn, the olives with their sinuous trunks aslant and silvery-spangled arms uplifted seemed like a hoary company of Bacchic

dancers, charmed asleep in the poise of some forgotten ritual measure, but ready at some wizard sign to break the spell and dance again.

Orlando's heart was singing with the vernal impulse, so that he could not keep its flow of music from his lips. Led by his little guide, he skirted the crumbling wall with its rich cloak of clematis and ivy, its gems of springing flowers in every crevice, with here and there a tower discrowned of battlements or a ruined roadless gate. From time to time he gained an eminence above the olives from which he could catch wide vistas of the plain. The emerald and amethyst were growing clearer, the pale dots of the houses standing sharper. The boy pointed with his brown hand to the various cities — Perugia, Bastia, Bettona, Torgiano, Canara, Bevagna, Montefalco, Trevi, and at length Spoleto — as they shone out in bright succession on their violet slopes, until the whole heart of Umbria to its billowy sky-line and the whole breadth of blue above glowed in one radiant harmony of richest colour. It was like the awakening of a broad slow smile of infinite kindness.

On, up and down they went, climbing the stony ridges, plunging through verdant dewy glens that rippled with small streams and laughed with myriads of delicate flowers. Below the towering convent of St. Clare they left the path that skirts the city, threading their way between the corn beneath the elms and poplars. They lingered by a fountain spring with a picture of Madonna in a shrine above it, a lovely Presence to preside as the tutelary deity of such a gracious place. The banks were bright with butter-

cup, crane's bill and forget-me-not, under them, rustle and flash of emerald lizards, over them, hum and dart of myriad insect wings. They passed a towered farm which in stern Baglioni days had been a fortress, though to-day hens, pigs and oxen held its cavernous interior, and from a sunny lane with a wide view they dipped by a steep descent to shadowy orchards. They skirted an oblong tank with bright-scarved women washing clothes and a stream that tinkled into it from an old carven spout under a giant fig-tree that was already tufted with little gloves of green. Beneath the fig-tree sat an old grandame on a warm stone wall hushing a brown baby with the low croon of an immemorial rhyme. The women looked up smiling to the handsome youth, who loitered chattering to them of the weather and their crops.

A little further on, a girl in a field cried out the sudden snatch of a stornello — a breathless gush of lilting words ending in a trill of grace-notes, hard to catch, but surely the natural counterpart of the birds' rapture in the human voice. "*Fiore di riso*," she sang, "*fiore d'alloro*" and "*fiore di more*."

Orlando waited till she paused, then caught the melody and in his glorious tenor sang for answer;

*"Fior di menta —
E la bellina mia quella che canta;
Venite! che l'amore mi tormenta."*

Climbing into an apple tree the girl looked over the may-hedge at the singer, but seeing him to be a stranger, laughed gaily and returned to her work.

Orlando, laughing too, pursued his way to the convent and chanted with full voice the verse of an old

peasant song, into which he poured his overflowing happiness.

*"Ed ho cenato al tavolin d'argento,
Non ce credeo' d'ave' trovato tanto;
Vennero tre vivande in un momento,
Zucchero e mele e lo mio amore accanto."*

II

"Sugar and apples and my love beside." Within Orlando's world was little else. His was not the natural world of man's inheritance, in which Nature schools her children for survival, but only the artificial world of the favoured and the fittest, who have but little living knowledge of the worlds of the less fit — who survive.

It was not the world of the old road-mender, who, as Orlando crossed the highroad, looked up from his pile of stones in the dazzling sun-glare and the dust of carts and motor-cars, and smiling at his good looks wished him a pleasant walk, before he set once more to tapping, tapping with his little hammer, his coarse hands, weather-beaten face and naked feet torn by the flying splinters and chapped by wind and sun. It was not the world of the barefoot woman staggering down the stony path under a crushing load of sticks, gathered in five hours of toil that morning, who held out her hand with a plaintive prayer for a soldo and invoked a hundred blessings when Orlando gave her two. It was not the world of the old grandame rocking the infant by the tank, who, prematurely aged by a hard life of labour, had henceforth to fight and

grumble over each mouthful of soft food for her toothless gums in the house of married children, that only wondered why death tarried to relieve them of the burden. It was not even the world of the girl who blithely cried out her birdlike song with the natural strident edge in her clear strong voice, so different in quality from Orlando's rounded tones.

Life meant for these one narrow uphill path without a turning or the choice of an alternative, a path to be followed unrestingly year by year and hour by hour, the half-articulated riddle of its purpose answered only in some half-comprehended way by the religion of submission and of hope. Except for this one mute question flung at the sky in hours of crisis, their world was that of their own beasts with a little longer tether. It was the small world of the familiar and the particular that knew nothing of the wider world of abstract generalities. It included not the criticism of intellectual theories, the achievement of an artistic ideal or high ambition; it meant simply living for work and work for living—and of this Orlando could know almost nothing.

For Orlando was an egoist, not, as these were, from the insistence of physical needs, but from sheer exuberance of vitality. His battle was not, as theirs, for life, but for fame, for victory, for battle's sake. Courage and optimism were his constant mood, because defeat had never taught him fear. He liked to read and think upon great problems, arriving at clear conclusions the more easily because his reasoning was unhampered by his feelings, and especially by that reserve which is born of spiritual pain. He knew

neither the ache of doubt nor the sense of sin and exile from his Maker; he pitied the sufferer with but little comprehension of the suffering. He needed no appeal to spiritual worlds to justify the world of sense, which justified itself by its own obvious beauty. That which it could not justify he simply did not realise. With his physical health, his good looks, his charm, his voice, his universal popularity, his beautiful wife and his talent of success, the keen light of his happiness shone with so bright a glow that it blinded him to the troop of mysteries and living problems lurking behind the veil of his illusion.

III

Within the little convent chapel, when at length Orlando reached it, were gathered a score of peasant women and as many children, kneeling upon the worn brick floor, their bright blouses and kerchiefs lighting up the semi-darkness. The commemoration of the Miraculous Crucifix was an important festival for the community, and most of the neighbouring farms were making holiday. Father Filippo, as he lighted the tapers, told the legend to Orlando. The artist had carved the Body of the sacred Figure, but in his humility had left the Head uncut, to find it miraculously finished in a single night. The friar led Orlando forward that he might see it better and showed him how if he looked from one side or the other the expression of suffering changed to that of death. To-day the arch above the altar was hung with red cloth and tinsel braid, while upon it were many tapers burning with

bunches of artificial flowers between them. Orlando gazed for a few minutes and then went back into the little nave.

The air was exhausted from the crowd of peasants long before the bell rang for the great event, the High Mass at the altar of the Crucifix. At this signal the men, who had hitherto stood outside in the courtyard, pressed in and gathering round the door made the atmosphere yet more stifling. Holding their hats in thick brown fingers they trooped down the three steps clumsily with their great boots and knelt upon one knee, staring vacantly about them. Someone played a gay tune jauntily upon the jingling organ and three novices with lights, followed by three vested priests, came out from behind the High Altar and made their way with difficulty through the kneeling peasants. The friars in the choir sang florid music with rough untrained voices, the peasants shuffled, chairs squeaked on the uneven floor, the door wheezed open and fell to with a clatter as men at the back pressed in and out.

It was all so poor and humble. The nave was just an oblong cellar with a round tunnel roof. The plaster, mottled by a few scarred relics of crude early frescoes, was almost black with age and smoke — as though the place had been gutted by fire — except for the white blotches where the surface layers had peeled away. On the walls hung a few engravings of the Stations of the Cross with a half-burnt taper in a bracket before each. From the arch of the small chapel of the Crucifix depended three large lamps; rows of votive hearts or tiny pictures in gilt frames adorned the walls within. On either side of

the High Altar were two large mediocre modern pictures illustrating the history of St. Clare; beyond, under the low arch and between the six tall tapers could be seen the little choir with its plain old wooden stalls. Another heavy baroque altar with an indifferent painting, two dark confessionals, a few chairs and benches — the humblest country parish church could seem hardly poorer to Orlando's eyes than this.

He had never realised until this moment all that the change of life must have meant to his friend. He contrasted this humble Franciscan service for the peasants with the stately masses at the larger convents, not understanding how it was that Anselmo, when he determined to become a monk, had not joined the Benedictines, or at least the Conventual Franciscans. Why had he wished to break so utterly with all that he had loved as a boy? The peasants jostled Orlando as they pressed by him to see better; they chattered, cleared their throats noisily and spat upon the floor. It exasperated him to think that his friend should have surrendered a life so rich in promise for the work of moulding this rough material. He recalled Anselmo's fastidious eye and intellect, his preference for solemn Gothic ritual and Gothic music, his love of clear strong thought. He remembered a scene of the earliest days of their friendship when they had listened together to a portion of the sermon of a Capuchin; in the middle of which Anselmo with flushed cheeks had taken him by the arm, marched him out of the church and all the way home had stormed in boyish eloquence because the reasoning was false and narrow in his opinion. He himself had

paid little attention to the argument, being merely astonished that any man should care what an old friar preached about. He wondered if Anselmo had learned patience now from long experience of such discourses. But he remembered that he had always felt like a child when he talked to him; he had loved him more than other men because he could never understand him.

The service over, the peasants passed out into the sunshine and Bernardo came towards him smiling and silently took both his hands in his own. It was difficult for Orlando to recognise his old friend in this tall bony friar whose body seemed to be a mere ungainly piece of mechanism. Bernardo led him through the little choir into the cloister and introduced him to a number of his companions — Father Silvestro, the guardian of the convent, Father Domenico, Father Filippo and Father Girolamo. Orlando had never been among so many monks before; he had not the least idea what he could say to them. But Girolamo left him no time to wonder.

"Wasn't it all beautiful?" he said happily, as a child might speak of a display of fireworks. "Oh, of course, you must remember that this is only a little place and judge our efforts by our means. Father Giuliano from the Angeli tuned the organ yesterday on purpose and taught us the new Mass. And then, what a lot of people came! Did you find a place where you could see?"

The other friars were discussing the question as to what flowers could be planted in the four little beds of earth which Girolamo had laid out on the stone

pavement in the centre of the small quadrangle. Girolamo was laughingly apologetic over his garden.

"It doesn't seem as if any of my infants were going to flourish," he groaned, "the others are very unkind about them. You see, they have really very little earth, poor little ones! The sun dries it all up so soon and the rain-storms wash it all away and that makes a mess. But I shouldn't have thought of it at all, if it hadn't been for the American lady. How she got in here, I never could discover; for it's against the Rule for women to come in here, you know. However she got in; she said she had come from Chicago, and she wasn't going to be put off. Well, while I was explaining to her that she must go immediately, she began talking about St. Francis and the piece of ground he set apart for his sisters, the flowers of the field, and she said we ought to be ashamed of our barren stones in here. So I tried to make a garden. But the little sisters won't come up!"

"You probably put the bulbs in upside down!" said Domenico sarcastically.

Girolamo looked troubled for a few moments, while the others laughed. Then his face cleared. "No," he said thoughtfully, "I don't think that can be the reason. I probably put some of them one way and some the other."

Girolamo was probably quite as capable of planting bulbs as any of those who laughed at him, but he would not lose the chance of laughing at himself. He laughed with his head thrown back and his mouth open, a whistling, sibilant laugh, like the chirrup of innumerable grasshoppers.

Orlando was pleased to find himself between him and Bernardo in the small refectory, which is unchanged since the days on which St. Clare at the Pope's bidding blessed the bread and a cross miraculously appeared on every loaf. The low, vaulted ceiling broods lovingly over this room of many memories, on whose time-worn benches, placed all round against the walls with narrow tables riveted into the floor before them, twice every day for seven hundred years some company of holy men have sat at meat. After the grace a novice read a few verses from the gospel and a short passage from the "Imitation"; then silence was "dispensed" for the occasion by the Guardian, and soon the room rang with the talk and laughter of some five-and-thirty men, of whom Orlando was the only one without the cord and the Franciscan habit. Great steaming dishes were brought in by the lay brothers and placed at various points upon the tables; each friar in turn helped himself and passed them on.

Girolamo had been to Paris in his boyhood and was glad to be able to compare his impressions with those of Orlando. Filippo, who sat on Bernardo's left, had a brother who had emigrated to the United States and wrote him long letters twice a year to tell him of all the wonders of New York. He questioned Orlando about the more obvious features of the great European cities, and contrasted his answers with what he knew of such things in America. But Bernardo sat wistful and silent with his eyes fixed at a point beyond his plate. He was tired and nervous after his long night of sleeplessness, and now beneath the ripple of these little surface waves he was listening as from

a quiet backwater to the distant roar of the mightier cataracts of life.

IV

It was not long before Girolamo had asked Orlando to sing. "After all," he said, "we have done our best for you this morning." Orlando laughed at the simplicity of the request, but when the meal was over he allowed himself to be conducted to a white-washed room where stood the novices' piano.

Bernardo longed to hear Orlando sing again; he followed and sat down in a far corner while the others ranged themselves on benches round the room or clustered eagerly about the singer. Orlando pulled the piano away from the wall so that, sitting at it, he could look out on to the fields. As he struck the first few chords he could scarcely repress a laugh; he had never sung to such a poor tinkling instrument nor to any audience that would have expected him to sing to it. But he was not daunted. Gazing out through the open window into the sunshine, he poured forth all the fullness of the spring and his youth until the whole place throbbed with the glory of his singing. Inebriate with his own happiness and the beauty of the scene before him, he sang in that poor little white-washed room as though he were singing in the Scala.

After a few bars the friars who had gathered round the piano stole silently away and sat down by the wall. At the first pause no one spoke, but one of the older fathers rose and crept out. Orlando sang on for the joy of his own voice, caring very little for the opinion of his audience, but stimulated perhaps by the

strangeness of his surroundings, until the music filled that bare and white-washed room with all the glamour of life's illusions, and quickened in each heart dumb instincts and desires, the germs of those potential worlds which for these men had never been. It inspired to emulation a caged blackbird in a neighbouring window and the pauses were filled in with its treble obligato. Orlando was too happy to be troubled at the competitor. He sang a favourite cycle of German songs, and afterwards operatic arias, passing from one to another without waiting to be entreated. Few, if any, of his listeners had ever heard music like it in their lives.

At length Father Patrizio hid his eyes under his hand; the others could see that he was weeping. Thereupon Father Tomaso got up in a flurry with flushed face and angry glance. He went off to find the Guardian; the thing was a scandal to his mind, and must be stopped at once. But the Guardian was saying vespers and compline with the novices in the choir; Father Tomaso joined them, but perforce had to wait until the office was concluded. Father Domenico followed Tomaso; the young man had certainly a fine voice in his opinion, but he did not care for his choice of songs, and the singing was too loud for the room. Father Filippo was but little affected by music; he stayed some little while longer out of politeness, then considered that he had perhaps better not countenance what Tomaso and Domenico evidently disapproved of, and he too stole away upon tiptoe.

Presently Orlando sang some old songs of the people, an exquisite sob in his voice; Patrizio choked and

slipped away to his cell. They recalled the day of his parting with his mother and sister in the little house of his birth overlooking the Bay of Naples. He felt again all the remorse at the cruelty of his decision. He saw how his mother's lips trembled as she kissed him, and he realised more poignantly than ever before how with his going the light of her days had been quenched.

When at length Orlando stopped and looked round, the little room was empty except for Girolamo and Bernardo. Girolamo had been in Heaven and had heard the heavenly choirs. The only emotions that music gave to him were mystic; he loved everything in the world too much to regret the sacrifice of any one thing.

"How can I ever say enough for all the joy you have given me?" he cried ecstatically.

"But where are all the others?" said Orlando, a shade of annoyance on his handsome face. "Didn't they like it too?"

Bernardo in his corner was staring blindly before him, feeling only the barrenness within his heart, and a whole world outside crying and beating against it. "I think some of us liked it only too well, Orlando," he said quietly.

V

Bernardo led Orlando to the tank in the garden, by which he had first spoken to Girolamo of his desire to enter the Order. They sat down on the stone margin and Orlando leaned over to watch the bronze and golden fish in the brown depths. Suddenly he

started up and threw out his arms towards the sunshine, the light of his singing still in his eyes.

"Oh, if I were ever to found a religious order," he cried with a joyous laugh; "just think of it! It should be dedicated to the Beauty of God! I would gather round me all the poets, all the painters, all the singers, and we would teach mankind that in the clash of creeds and dogmas there is one truth which is constant, and that is the work of the Spirit of Loveliness! There you have the one great article of my creed, Anselmo!"

"Is that all, Orlando?" asked Bernardo sadly, without looking up.

"No! For the rest I believe that every sacrifice for high ideals is lovely, and that every creed is true according as it makes for spiritual beauty!"

"Every creed? Can you not make any rational choice between them?"

"How can I decide? I have read something of them all and to some extent I believe them all. I think I owe to you my love for high thoughts and splendid systems. But I cannot believe that one is wholly true, if the others therefore must be false."

"And yet it must be so, surely?" said Bernardo.

"Forgive me, but I do not believe you think that any more than I. To appreciate the truth of any creed in its fulness is the work of years of study, and then it will be one's deepest prejudice or sympathy that will decide for it or against it. There is so much to say on every side of every argument that no one has the time to read and think all round. Most minds just drift about in search of a conviction till, caught

up by one current or another, they are carried so far as to be out of reach of tides. Most men read books saying all the while in secret: 'No, I don't believe that!' or 'Yes, I do!' and this attitude will fix their faith. Afterwards experience goes to confirm the decision, because we all most clearly perceive the tendencies that influence us, and quite unconsciously emphasise them in our surroundings. For of all truth the creative power is life. Life! More Life! that is my prayer. Life, which is the supreme gift of whatever God has made us, the gift that builds up and sustains the rest! I can think of no deeper prayer or of no higher praise, than to ask that as He has given hitherto, He may give yet more and more hereafter!"

Erect in his splendid health and beauty, intoxicated with his own rhetoric, his eyes shining and his arms uplifted towards the sun, Orlando seemed like the inspired prophet of some joyous Pagan god. Not all the infinite difference between their spiritual natures could quench Bernardo's thrill of admiration. Then he glanced down at his own brown habit and his sandalled feet upon the gravel.

"I am afraid, Orlando, you must think in your heart that to have taken vows such as I have is to have surrendered a great deal of life for one single view of it?"

"Oh, no, no!" answered Orlando remorsefully. "I was not thinking of that. I can never treat you otherwise than as my old friend, Anselmo Serafini, with whom I used to discuss every idea that came into my head. I'm afraid I get too much superficial hap-

piness out of this life to concern myself much with any other!"

"Perhaps you are too dazzled with your own happiness to see now what you will have to learn some day."

For a moment Orlando was silent, almost humbled, like a child rebuked, before the irrepressible gush of his ideas broke forth again.

"To me it is all a question of vitality," he went on, striding up and down before Bernardo and speaking with large energetic gestures. "I would translate all truth into terms of Life. Surely only those ideas are true which live, propagate themselves and prove creative by extending the world of human consciousness. For me the proof of any creed lies in its vigour and fruitfulness. Think how true was Christianity in past ages to have inspired such glory, not only of sanctity, but also of art, architecture and music! Think how vital it was then, so to have intensified man's spiritual vision, and ennobled his sense of beauty! Think too of all those supreme artists of the soul, the saints! The exquisite beauty of the life of St. Francis is worth for me a thousand times all the scholastic proofs of God, invented by the followers of Dominic! Maybe there are as many saints to-day as ever, but they do not stand out as they did once. Yet oh, Anselmo, Anselmo!" he burst out with feeling, "it is still men such as *you* who are the living proof to us worldlings of the truth of God, of Christ, of holiness and all the rest!"

Bernardo could not trust himself to answer. He sat with his eyes fixed on the gravel path, conflicting

tides of feeling ebbing and flowing through his heart. He knew even better than Orlando that the witness of the Church in the minds of most men is not her logic, but her charm. Then while he was tacitly agreeing with this line of thought, the point was turned upon himself by the personal appeal; it was to such as him that men like Orlando looked for help, and what had he to give? An unhesitating assurance of God's ruling in the Church's ruling, of her absolute and universal authority? Strong in his faith he should have taken up the challenge; he thought of his night of sleepless questioning; he pressed Orlando's hand in his for an instant and was silent.

Orlando gave him back his old tricks of thought, the wide humanistic generalities founded upon sympathetic observation of other men's minds without prejudice or dogmatic assumptions about truth and error. Perhaps it was just because Orlando's way of thinking owed so much to his own influence in former years that despite its superficiality it stirred him so profoundly. Some self-tormenting impulse urged him to probe his own wound to the bottom by leading his old pupil on to talk of the materialism of France, the scepticism of Germany and of all the new philosophies and creeds he had met with on his travels. He questioned him concerning recent literature and listened eagerly when he recited glowing stanzas from some modern poet. How passionately he had loved such poetry once! How often they had shared together the delight of some new treasure of beautiful phrase that either had discovered! The old intoxi-

cation reawakened in Bernardo's heart with a poignant remorse for the long years when he had scarcely remembered it. Orlando, like most cultured Italians, knew much poetry by heart and could repeat it musically; the heroic fire and classic pregnancy of Carducci, the rich sensuous rhetoric of D'Annunzio, the tender idyllic sentiment of Pascoli, with shorter spells from many a less-known writer charmed away the hours.

When the sun was low over the western hills behind Perugia, and the garden chilled with lengthening shadows, the friar took his friend to his cell, and showed him his books and the pile of manuscript he was preparing for his history of the first years of the Order. Orlando asked questions and tried to interest himself in it, but both of them felt the icy contrast of these dissections of dead issues after their talk of the living forces in men's minds. Remembering their old discussions in boyhood upon the relative value of men's acts and thoughts, "I never guessed that you would ever become an historian," Orlando said.

"One never knows what one will become," Bernardo answered, and the shadow of silence, which for some while had been looming, fell upon them both. Coming out of the cell they met Domenico, who offered to take Orlando round the library and the students' room. Bernardo had no wish to go with them. He was bewildered by the vision of bright worlds that made his own seem cold and pale. He wanted to be alone and to think and think; yet after his restless

night he was weary; he needed still more to lie down and sleep. He waited for the others with his cell door open.

After about ten minutes they returned. The novices had struck Orlando as mere raw boys, strangely callow and unformed by reason of the suppression of their natural ardours.

"The younger they come to us the better," Domenico was saying as they came into earshot. "When they are older it is far more difficult for them to adapt themselves to the discipline of the Rule."

At the convent gate Girolamo joined them to say good-bye to Orlando and to thank him once more for his music. As they went out, the caged blackbird burst into song. Orlando glanced up at it.


"It is a true Christian, and sings its office as regularly as we," Girolamo remarked, reading his thought. "It does not mind its prison in the least, for, you see, we picked it up and tamed it before it could fly."

"Yes," said Orlando, "but it does not know how it might have served God also with its nest and with its wings."

"It would certainly have been gobbled up by the devil in the shape of a cat," retorted Girolamo.

VI

The next evening Orlando left Assisi. Bernardo saw him to the station and returned to the city by the highroad. As he entered the gate, he was passed by a succession of motor-cars that involved him in clouds of dust. They carried a number of rich tourists who




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were returning to Perugia for the night. Every morning throughout spring and early summer the shrine is visited by scores and even hundreds of artistic and religious dilettanti. The mediæval pilgrim would kneel and sing his hymn before he ventured to enter the seraphic city; these modern pilgrims take the slope as quickly as their engines will permit them, the only hymn they sing at entrance being a harsh peremptory note to clear the road.

In the cloistered square before the great Basilica were groups of well-dressed foreigners coming from the church. How many had been there to pray? Bernardo wondered. They had remained as long as the light lasted, and now that the evening shadows veiled the splendid frescoes the house of God was empty and deserted. With the chill of its incense-laden air under the rich gloom of the low vaults, it seemed to Bernardo, after the sunlit roads, as though he entered some vast cavern. The sound of his sandalled feet upon the flags, and the quiet voices of two conventual friars moving between the High Altar and the Sacristy, only served to make the hush more solemn. Bernardo wished to rest for a few minutes before entering the gates of the sanctuary; he sat down upon the stone steps of the chapel of St. Martin, leaning back against the iron grating.

Sitting thus, his eyes sought the storied windows that shone like the rich jewelled blades of seraphim in the glowing dusk behind him. Thence his glance wandered over the gentle frescoes with which Simone Martini of Siena had clothed the walls. Bernardo loved them not alone for their delicacy of drawing



and the richness of their elusive tones, where every colour shimmers like shot silk, but still more for their subtle poetry. Just above him, through the iron bars, he saw the picture wherein St. Martin offers to go forth to fight the Saracen unarmed. Then he turned his gaze to the next picture, wherein the Emperor girds the saint with knightly belt and sword, gazing up in awe and wonder at his rapture, as though partaking in some mystic revelation through the ecstasy of the young seer of God. A warrior fastens on the spurs, while attendants, looking on, reflect the wonder in their master's face. But the saint in the solitudes of his holiness stands with hands clasped and eyes uplift to worlds remote from earthly honour.

On the right of this picture is a small group of musicians, foremost among whom is a man with a lute, whom Bernardo loved as by spiritual kinship. He seems to be the subtlest spirit in his presence, howbeit lowliest in temporal station. The strong world, impatient of him and his kind, jostles him out of its busy path, heedless of his tinkling strains. He is a man filled with ideals yet disillusioned, clinging to his dreams in unexpressed despair. Bernardo felt that just as the vision of the saint makes pale the pomp of thrones, so do these dwellers in the world of dreams wither the glow and weigh the worth of crowns and creeds alike. "Life is a real thing," cries the mighty Tuscan, Giotto, from every other wall in the great church, "work, pray, fear God and learn to rule thy fate!" "Life is a dream," responds the gentle Siennese from his quiet chapel, "make thy world sweet with mystic flowers, cling fast to thine illusions, that

never jar of doubt or dread can violate the sanctuary of thy peace!"

Bernardo sat upon the chapel steps, reading the message of the fresco, until a sudden chill struck through him, and his heart was numbed by a secret fear he scarcely dared to face. He rose, and, moving down the nave into the transept, threw himself upon his knees before the Blessed Sacrament. The prayer he repeated again and again was: "Lord, Lord, look not upon my doubts but my desire!"

Suddenly over the trouble of his mind a wave of infinite peace was rolled. It came not merely from the darkness, the silence, and the sense that he was kneeling in one of the holiest shrines on earth. It was something deeper than all conscious thought, haply the haunting presence of seven centuries of prayer. For even as the daily incense soaks into the very stones with the smoke of tapers and of sanctuary lamps, so has the soul of faith breathed upward in this place, until each vault and wall is steeped in mystic prayer and aspiration.

For surely every thought and yearning is a motive power which exists apart from its creator, and every prayer a force which continues to push on for ever in the direction of its utterance. Just as each ray sent forth by a star arrows through space for all eternity, till we may gaze to-night upon the flash of some vast conflagration of colliding suns, burnt out for ages, so in our lives and thoughts may we not be perpetually influenced by prayers thrown out in ecstasy from hearts long centuries ago dissolved in dust?

CHAPTER II

THE NARROW ROUND

I

THE days following Orlando's departure were dark and difficult for Bernardo. He was unable to concentrate his mind either upon his office, his meditation or his writing. The weeks of fair weather were succeeded, as is often the case in an Umbrian spring, by wind and ceaseless driving rain that blotted out the radiant smile of the land, shutting off the little convent more than ever from the world, and accentuating the sense of its spiritual isolation.

The grey shroud penetrated into Bernardo's soul, till he felt the conventual atmosphere as Orlando had felt it; it froze his heart and brain. The struggle in the external ring of life began again.

In the refectory he was critical and fastidious. He noticed Father Tomaso's obvious gluttony, and the grunts and noises which he and another old friar made while they ate. Worse than this, looking up with annoyance, he met Tomaso's eye, so that the latter recognised his disapproval. Tomaso was a fat and rather irritable man, painfully aware of his own shortcomings and inwardly fuming under criticism. Bernardo's quick glance spoilt his dinner. He watched

him resentfully for the rest of the meal out of the corner of his eye.

In the meanwhile the monotonous drone and coarse accent of the young peasant-born novice reading aloud a long passage from an ancient sermon irritated Bernardo, who had already heard it many times. As he listened to-day he was exasperated both because the matter was old-fashioned and also because the music of the beautiful phrases was spoilt by being read so badly. He felt irreverently towards the book, and at the same time uncharitably towards his comrades who seemed to be indifferent to its charm. The struggle in the intellectual ring re-opened.

At the conclusion of the meal, Cristoforo, the old lay brother, took out the broken meats to distribute with bowls of soup to two or three cripples, some aged people, sick children and certain fever-stricken youths who had caught the malaria while working in the Maremma. The youths greeted the lay brother rudely, grumbling because the food was not to their taste; they disputed with the cripples and old people for the best portions, as each in turn held out his metal plate. Above the tumult could be heard the voice of the lay brother scolding the boys with homely peasant oaths, his many years of service at the convent notwithstanding. Father Girolamo hurried to his assistance, and with the knotted ends of his cord administered a few sound cuts to the noisiest disputants. For a short space there was a din as of a free fight in the court-yard, before gradually the noise subsided and Girolamo entered the chapel, flushed with victory.

The rest of the community were already saying

Vespers. The little incident was of too frequent recurrence to disturb or interest the others, but it added to Bernardo's irritation. As the familiar psalms were hurried through, they seemed to him to be a purely mechanical devotional exercise. One or two of the fathers were obviously drowsy; several of the novices looked bored and vacant. Bernardo tried to concentrate his thoughts, but could only feel depressed by the coldness of the others. How many of them had any conception of the vital worlds of thought, of art, literature and philosophy, which were throbbing round them with vast energies and eternally engendering new worlds, while their small world murmured drowsily in its little narrowing circles, like a humming-top that drones and sleeps before it runs down and rolls away?

As the friars passed out of the little choir to their cells, the garden, or the cloister for the time of recreation, Bernardo overheard Girolamo describing with indignant gestures the insolence of that rascal Checchi and the thrashing he would administer if ever the ruffian dared to show his face at the convent doors again.

A few minutes later in the garden Domenico approached him. Domenico was a slight, quick man, with small regular features, at this moment lit up with excitement. He carried a little printed pamphlet in his hand, the proofs of some short study of his writing, which had just been accepted by a French review. From time to time he had published articles and "prose poems" in various Catholic periodicals, but this was a more ambitious venture, and to see it

printed in a secular magazine filled him with an almost childish pride. His mother had been a Frenchwoman, and he liked to prove that he could "compose" in either language with equal facility. He had moods when he interwove his conversation with French phrases, to the secret annoyance of most of the community, who could not understand them. Such was his manner to-day as he showed the proofs to Bernardo, reading him passages with excessive emphasis.

Domenico always spoke of his efforts with semi-humorous modesty, although expecting others to take them seriously. He called them his children, and tapped his forehead when he made his perennial little joke about having his quiver full of them. He considered that Bernardo was his only intellectual equal in the convent, and valued his opinion upon his writings accordingly. But Bernardo found them false and over-elaborate; it was difficult to effect a compromise between Domenico's vanity and his own conscience. To-day he wearily recognised each trick of style and felt more incapable than ever of adequate response. His vanity wounded, Domenico thrust the proofs into his habit and retired to his cell, saying to himself that he had thought Bernardo too large-minded and too generous to be envious of his success.

Although a man of considerable intellectual and spiritual distinction, Domenico exactly typified that mental attitude with which at this time Bernardo was impatient. For Domenico thought in abstract categories, and labelled each new phenomenon by a dis-

tinctive definition. Logic and metaphysic, cosmology and ontology, psychology and theodicy, with moral and natural philosophy, had so divided up the universe between them that there was no problem, nothing in Heaven or Earth, for which they had not a perfect explanation. Dogmas for him were built up by logical principles upon absolute *à priori* truth. Logic was the sword of St. Michael wherewith to overcome the Father of Falsehood and Negation. Every idea must be either true or false, white or black; there could be no two sides to any question. Truth must be truth for everyone, faith was as daylight, and therefore if anyone did not believe as he did, it must be because that man deliberately closed his eyes. His own clearness and precision of mind made it impossible for him to understand another's point of view; his very shallowness made him on his own plane an invincible dialectician; but his world was of two, not three dimensions; his arguments were always logical but seldom true or real. Never having experienced the anguish of intellectual doubt at any spiritual crisis, he assumed that such a state of soul was a wilful or licentious indulgence. With the aid of his categories and analyses he found life easy to understand; but then, he had never lived.

II

A few days after Orlando's visit, under the auspices of a learned Assisan society, which Bernardo had joined for the sake of his book, a lecture was given by a distinguished university professor, who had chosen for his theme: "The Message of St. Francis

for To-day." Members of the Order were not often seen in the gatherings of these latter-day Franciscans, but Bernardo was weary of pusillanimous precautions. He thought it a mistake that the Church refrained from taking part in, and thus influencing the tone of, such institutions as were concerned with her history. Was it right for him to follow the Founder of his Order in ignoring the grave questions of contemporary thought? The controversies raged no longer around arid subtleties of scholastic logic; they touched upon the very heart of faith.

The hall in which the lecture was held was the Sala of the Communal Library, a pleasant room lined with bookcases filled with rare volumes in old bindings, under a rich ceiling painted by the pupils of Zuccari. The audience consisted of some score of foreigners, chiefly English ladies of the Anglican church, perhaps an equal number of ladies from the chief Assisan families, then two or three noted professors, a handful of schoolmasters, engineers, advocates and writers, some of whom were indifferent, some actively hostile to religion — few if any being "practising" Catholics. Besides these, standing at the back of the room and around the door, was a crowd of students and public school boys dressed in their almost military uniforms. The only other cleric besides himself was a secular priest, well-known for his liberal opinions.

The usher led Bernardo to the front row of chairs, which at the time of his entrance contained the only vacant seats. Here he was accosted by his friend the librarian, who introduced him to one or two of his neighbours.

From the beginning of the lecture Bernardo was charmed by the eloquence and distinction of the language, and the sympathetic blend of refinement and learning which pervaded the atmosphere of the assembly. But the tone of the discourse before long awoke his disquiet, not so much by what was expressed in it as by what was implied.

The speaker appeared to assume that the ancient documents on which our knowledge of the saint is founded — the lives by Celano and St. Bonaventure, the Fioretti, the Mirror of Perfection, and so forth — were all more or less inventions of monkish ingenuity, written in order to conceal or distort the real figure of one who, far from being anything so lifeless and colourless as an ordinary Catholic saint, was rather an ardent reformer and a standing reproach to the worldliness of the ecclesiastical authorities, whose policy was first to suppress him and that failing, to absorb his power for their own purposes. On this assumption it followed that all the incidents which display St. Francis as a faithful and humble son of the church must be distrusted as fictitious by the impartial historian, while only those which show his independence and originality can be accepted as substantially true, though possibly modified and misinterpreted. In fact, the lecturer did what he charged the Church with doing; he created a phantasma of learned fiction in order to preach his own opinions upon modern society and religion, which but for the great name of St. Francis would scarcely have been listened to so patiently. He exploited the emotional glamour of the figure, although

depriving it of all significance by denial of the faith by which that glamour was created.

There was little perhaps in the lecturer's delicately balanced phrases that stood out with sufficient sharpness to strike hard and fix itself upon the minds of his listeners. The luxuriant beauty of his style mitigated the destructive force of his ideas. He implied, rather than asserted, that the Church was out of touch with the modern world, was as decadent to-day as when St. Francis saved it from ruin. He suggested that a new St. Francis would stand outside it, that a new Franciscan movement would not be absorbed and perverted so easily as the old had been. He erected on the basis of the saint's simplicity the theory that he was opposed to dogma. The fact that he never became a priest indicated his distrust of sacerdotalism. He was above all else a poet who hated rigid sects, and accordingly would hardly call himself a Catholic were he alive to-day. One gathered that he would preach a philanthropic socialism, the Return to Nature, the Simple Life and an amiable Pantheism sufficiently vague to impose upon its votaries no serious personal sacrifice either of leisure or liberty of thought.

The lecture was politely applauded. There was no opportunity for discussion or reply, albeit, besides Bernardo several of the historians present must have recognised that the view of the lecturer was one-sided. The English ladies applauded, though perhaps they had not understood completely, being delighted with the atmosphere of erudition and romantic mysticism and haply feeling vaguely how wise and

just was the "*via media*" of the English Church. The Italian ladies applauded, thinking principally of the beauty of the language, and that these lectures were becoming quite a social function in Assisi. The youths and students applauded because the tone was anti-clerical, though regretting that the lecturer had not spoken out more plainly.

Humiliated and depressed, Bernardo escaped, and walked rapidly out of the streets and on to the hill-side. Perceiving that for the rest of the audience the lecture had been no more than an afternoon's amusement, he felt a fool for taking it so seriously. Bitterly he thought of the new Franciscan paradox: there is no saint who in our noisy and commercial age attracts so many wealthy votaries as this Bridegroom of Poverty; about whom so many books are written and lectures read, or whose name is so often quoted by writers of heresy and rationalism, as this most loyal son of Holy Obedience, this Apostle of Holy Simplicity and her "Sister" Humility. It seemed to him that a sentimental travesty of this great Catholic Saint had been tricked out during the last twenty years by men who only use his fame to cover their own insidious onslaughts on the Church he loved and served so faithfully.

III

By the time that Bernardo reached the convent the long day's rain had ceased and the evening lights shone with a jewelled loveliness. The tattered fringes of the cloud-pall held the zenith and the eastern quarter,

leaving in the west a widening arc of green-blue sky, fretted with little rags of wrack, like the brown flecks in the matrix of the turquoise. The far hills beyond and around Lake Trasymene stood apart in clear successive tones of the amethyst and lapis lazuli.

Bernardo wandered into the convent garden, refreshing his spirit in the beauty of all green things after the rain. Suddenly at the bottom of the lowest terrace he noticed the bent figure of Father Martino, the oldest of the community, sitting upon a low stone wall with his head resting on his hands. The old friar was weeping piteously. Bernardo hurried down the path and touched his shoulder.

Father Martino lifted his white head. The tears were trickling down his withered cheeks. The rain had washed away the earth and ruined his asparagus.

Bernardo remembered that the old man's chief earthly interest was centered in the little strip of garden, which he was proud still to tend himself. The day when he gathered his asparagus was the great day of his year. He would make everyone eat some of it, and break his usual silence with exclamations in its praise. His world consisted of God and his garden. He had been nearly sixty years in the Order and was revered almost as a saint. He hardly ever spoke to anyone, but his lips were moving constantly as though in prayer. Sometimes he would break into a little song of his own making, some simple verses which no one had ever understood completely. One day the Guardian asked him why he sang in the refectory. Martino answered wistfully: "I think a man

is foolish not to sing when he can." And now he was weeping because the rain had spoiled his asparagus!

Bernardo tried to console him. "Couldn't we do something to put it right?"

The old man stared at him with his lips parted in amazement at such ignorance.

"The Lord has not wished us to have asparagus this year, and I doubt if I shall live until next spring."

Bernardo took Martino's hand and tried to lift it up, but he could only sit and stare at the ruins of his hopes. Bernardo kissed the old hand before he let it go.

The old friar, sitting weeping in the sunset, seemed to him a pathetic symbol of immense significance, and his own act like a farewell to a dream that has fled. The intellectual simplicity that is content to know all about a garden, and nothing about the teeming world, the simple faith that is troubled by few desires and no doubts, the small conventual life sufficing for the almost mediæval temperament — these were as the last gleams of a gentle day that is rapidly closing in night.

IV

Walking through the city on the following afternoon, Bernardo bethought him of a certain Signor Antonio Manzoni, an old Garibaldian campaigner who, having fought against the political dominion of the Church in early life, now showed an inclination to be reconciled to her in his old age. His two sons, the one an advocate, the other a doctor, with their

wives and a gang of noisy children, lived under the paternal roof, while two married daughters, with their offspring also, passed most of their days at gossip in the gloomy but spacious house. For some months it had been Bernardo's custom to sit for an occasional hour with the old soldier, and if conversation flagged, to read him a chapter of the "Imitation." His visits, however, were not well-received by the remainder of the family, who, having been brought up in an atmosphere of anti-clerical hostility, regarded the old man's change of attitude as a symptom of senile decay.

Notwithstanding their manifest discourtesy, Bernardo determined to seek out old Signor Antonio once more. Entering the house he found a gang of children filling the anterooms and corridors with deafening racket, while half-a-dozen persons, chiefly women, chattered with shrill voices in an ugly salon.

Signor Antonio was sitting in the melancholy solitude of his bare bedroom, to which a recent paralytic stroke confined him. He was a tall, spare man, large-featured, bald, with long grey whiskers, gentle, weak-minded, bowed in spirit by recent humiliation at his children's hands. He welcomed the friar gratefully with old-world courtesy, and reminding him that the day was the anniversary of some Garibaldian victory, plunged into reminiscence of his old campaigns. But hardly had they conversed for a few minutes when they were joined by one of his sons, who forthwith took the discourse from his father's lips with the set intent of insulting the unwelcome friar. The women and children meanwhile clustered round the door, thus indicating that some plan had been concerted at Bernardo's

entrance by the hostile family council in the adjoining room.

The son, a black-bearded man of forty, paced up and down the brick floor, pouring out with a resonant voice and considerable eloquence a lecture on the corruption and tyranny of the clerical government in Assisi more than half a century before; the repression of free thought by the Inquisition; the material backwardness of the land as compared with present-day development.

"Ah! my father could tell you of the terrible state of the people in those days, for he was one of those who helped to change it!" he cried, pointing at the old man, who, however, after one futile attempt at protest, hid his face in his hands and said no more. The women punctuated the discourse with murmurs of assent; the children nudged each other and stared rudely at the friar.

The speaker cited history in proof of the anti-national intrigues of Papal policy, of its opposition to the unity of Italy, and its alliance with the rapacious Frenchman and the detested Austrian. He compared the Church to a leaden hand crushing the vitality of the nation, to a cancer, to an immense octopus thrusting its poisonous suckers into its victim's every artery, a monster, doomed, but dangerous in decrepitude. He spoke of certain recent local scandals involving the names of priests, in order to give personal point to his tirade of traditional hostility.

"I, too, believe in God," he cried in conclusion; "but not in a God who requires to be worshipped by droning priests and monks and ignorant old women in

stuffy churches, nor by the intolerable inquisition of the confessional, nor by a thousand ancient superstitions and corruptions!"

"I shall not attempt to answer you," replied Bernardo when at last he paused for breath. "For I do not know whether you really believe all that you say. But I know well your object is not to be just, but only to insult me and to stop my visits to your father." He clasped the old man's hand in his for an instant as he added gently: "I am afraid there is nothing that I can do for you except to leave you in peace and pray for you."

The son of the house followed him into the passage. "I make no exaggeration; I don't say, as some do, that there are no good priests, but merely that the Church as a whole is the implacable enemy of all progress, social, industrial and political." With which he closed the house-door behind the friar.

His motive for personal aggression notwithstanding, Bernardo recognised he was sincere. But assuredly his position was as remote from the real issue as that of the modernist historian, because alike they saw in the Church no more than the survival of an obsolete intellectual or political tradition, while ignoring her unique embodiment of spiritual life.

V

The first external sign of the ferment taking place within Bernardo's mind was manifested in an address which he delivered in the convent chapel one evening during the ensuing week. Speaking of faith he said:

"Let critics say what they will of the human historical origins of what we hold to be divine, or of the metaphysical difficulties in the assumptions of our creed. We know that our faith is not related so much to a past sequence of events in history as to a present living inspiration. Ultimately it is touched neither by historical evidence nor philosophical opinion. Faith is the vital power proceeding from an ideal; its antithesis is not intellectual doubt, but spiritual death. The substance of faith is the Holy Spirit, not the intellectual proofs of God's existence or the images under which His Godhead is conceived. The critics fight upon a different plane; they assume that the believer is a rationalist like themselves, and so they try to substitute an abstract rational opinion for a living spiritual force. As if faith were the phantasm in the brain of something that was once alive or the acquiescence in a formula! Faith is above all else a living question, the very flame of spiritual life itself. The proof of the Gospels is their power, here, now and for ever; the proof of 'the Word made flesh' is that He is 'full of grace and truth.' For Truth 'is that which maketh alive'; there exists no other test. But the negation of our tremendous claims is just our coldness and inactivity, while around us men sin and die without one rapturous leap of recognition, one flash of that clear faith that makes them true."

Domenico and Filippo, the teachers of the novices, agreed that this doctrine was rank Modernism, tending, as it did, to set aside the sound scholastic view of truth in favour of some vague pragmatic test and thus inevitably placing the divine authority of the church

in jeopardy. They noticed across the twilight of the little choir a new interest in the elder students' faces which they mistook for curiosity. Domenico thought it his duty to administer to his class a special salutary dogmatic antidote; Filippo one afternoon a few days later, seeing Bernardo pacing up and down the convent cypress wood, seized the opportunity afforded to his curiosity for investigating the suspected father's views by accosting him, and after a few perfunctory remarks, enquiring whether he thought this dreadful modernist movement would still spread in spite of the Holy Father's condemnation.

Filippo was small, stout and short-sighted, wearing large round spectacles, which he had a nervous trick of constantly adjusting. When he spoke he screwed up his eyes and thrust his head forward, perhaps with the object of getting the face of the person he was addressing into focus. In company he would chatter rapidly and excitedly, hopping birdlike from subject to subject. His nervousness on the present occasion made it obvious that he had made up his mind to ask this question of set purpose.

"How can I say?" Bernardo answered evasively. "There seem to be so many kinds of Modernism. Some perhaps are vital, many certainly are not. In so far as the movement involves research into historical and critical detail, it seems to me to concern few beside specialists."

"But it is surely simple heresy!" exclaimed Filippo, clapping his hands and stopping in his walk.

"Heresy is perhaps less redoubtable to-day than mere indifference. For the world in general, it is not

the detail of dogma that is actually in question, but the living truth of the Christian vision as a whole. Modernists seem to me to be chiefly leisured people who think it right to renounce certain dogmas which they cannot reconcile with scientific preconceptions, thereby with an unconscious intellectual hypocrisy implying that they have so reconciled other stupendous mysteries of the Christian creed! They do not see apparently that it is inestimably more important to preserve the unity of the Vessel of Faith by individual submission to authority than to assert their personal doctrinal preferences out of a mistaken ideal of sincerity, which is usually little more than intellectual priggishness. For, after all, unity in Christ through loyalty to His earthly Representative is a spiritual reality, whereas individual opinion upon any point of dogma can be little more than a vague approximation or a symbol."

"Then you rejoice, as we all do, that the Church has so justly condemned them?"

"It seems to me that their condemnation is inexpedient, as giving too much importance to their views. If the Church is losing power over the modern world, it is not from intellectual but spiritual reasons. How many assent to-day from blind obedience or habit, how many oppose from blind prejudice, how many more fall away from blind indifference! It is far more important to teach men to love God humbly than to be merely learned in right doctrine. For, after all, the only ultimate proof of any creed is man's desire to believe it!"

"That may be so for the uneducated, of course,"

answered Filippo dubiously, "but we were speaking rather of those who, like ourselves, have logical reasons to support each dogma. It is we who look to the Infallible Witness in the Church to vindicate the Truth."

"We? Logical reasons?" replied Bernardo. "Surely we have much more than that, the Rule, our vows, these cords! All we have given up, all we have staked — life in the world, with its larger fields of battle! These are indeed far better reasons for belief!"

Gazing up at Bernardo towering above him with pale face lighted up amid the twilight of the sombre, thickset cypresses, Filippo felt his knees shake under him with a thrill of almost superstitious fear. Suddenly, without looking back, he darted between the tree-trunks and hurried stealthily away into the sunlit garden.

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE CRIPPLE

I

IN a small house just inside the city gate that leads towards San Damiano there dwelt a little friend of Bernardo's whose name was Linda Amori. Out of her twelve years of life, owing to some mysterious illness, she had spent the last seven upon her back. She lay in a tiny white-washed room close to a window, through which she looked over the olives to Perugia on its hilltops. She lived alone with her mother, who went out for the whole day to work, and, with the exception of the neighbour who brought in her dinner, Bernardo was her only visitor. Through the long days she used to lie singing to herself little childish songs in a thin pipe and imagining that she was playing in the sunshine. Entirely illiterate, on account of her simplicity, she was thought to be half-witted. She did not care to talk with other children if ever they ran in to stare at her, chattering of things which she had never seen, but preferred the children of her dream-games with whom she played in imagination. For these she had names and described their faces and their characters so vividly that, when first she spoke of them to Bernardo, he did not understand that they were not real children. The stories which

he related were of inestimable value to her; she wove them into her world of dreams.

This year as the weather grew warmer Linda's health so much improved that her mother felt the hour had arrived for the child to enter on her "career." Together with a sympathising neighbour she carried her out of doors one early morning and set her bed down by the principal door of the Church of St. Clare to beg from compassionate tourists.

Behind the child rose the gold-grey walls pierced by slender Gothic windows; over her arched the mighty flying buttresses, the foundations of which are built the width of a street away from the church; before her the town, with its slender towers and its violet-grey roofs in tiers, climbed the steep hill to the ruinous castle. It was wonderland to Linda Amori.

But alas, there are so many of the profession in Assisi that the advent of the new competitor was not approved. Old Giuseppe, with his clear blue eyes, his bristling hair and his rheumatism, found his stoical philosophy sorely tried, though he managed at length to say with a shrug of his shoulders: "Well, if the Lord wishes us to starve, we shall starve, I suppose." Melancholy old Anna, with her perennial cough, was unable to take the event so calmly; she wrung her hands and wiped her eyes, wailing that throughout her life she had been ousted by the young ones. Maddalena, the termagant, screamed with rage and was for carrying the child home again, had not chivalrous Guido restrained her. Ragged old Niccolò, who hobbled about the streets with one foot swathed in rags, collecting dung to sell to the peasants,

stopped in his work to stare at the strange apparition of this pale child in bed. He chuckled and laughed at her with toothless grin, shaking his long matted hair and pointing coaxingly: "Cocco mio! cocco mio!" "My duck! my duck!" he cried.

Lastly there stalked up to her bedside the ancient half-witted Guido, nicknamed "the Sultan," because of the condescending air with which he held out his hat and the look of offended dignity with which he withdrew it, if empty. He was a very tall bony old man, with a bristle of whiskers, a military moustache, immense beetling eyebrows and a bald dome of a head. Some held that he was possessed by a devil, and in corroboration told strange tales of wild acts of cruelty committed by him in sudden fits of unaccountable rage. When he saw Linda lying on her bed he took off his battered hat with a grand gesture to her, and holding it at arm's length, addressed her with much emphasis in phrases that nobody understood. But Anna screamed and Maddalena cursed him, saying at least the child should not be bewitched.

Notwithstanding the disapproval and agitation that her appearance excited, Linda lay in an ecstasy of pride and happiness. She was intoxicated with the bright air, the sunshine upon the opposite houses, the swallows chirping and wheeling high up in the blue, the cries and chatter of the hawkers, the cobblers who sewed shoes on the pavement, the carpenters who propped long planks against the house fronts, the women who drew water at the fountain, the boy who mended rush-bottomed chairs in the roadway, the

painted carts drawn by great white oxen, jingling with bells, which stopped so close to her bed that she could see the black flies on their silky flanks and smell of the breath of their wet noses, the children who played toss-penny on their way to school and the mothers who screamed to them, the ladies who walked abroad to market, the old gentlemen to sun themselves and argue, the church bells, the pious penitents and the hurrying parish priest,—the endless drama of a busy piazza upon a bright May morning. Above all, she was enchanted by the splendour of the rich foreigners, who were whirled up to her in their carriages or panting motor-cars, men in strange caps and ulsters, ladies under whose dresses she could hear a rustle of silk as they moved. At their coming Linda would upraise her small pipe piteously, as her mother had taught her to do, above the whines and murmurs of the older beggars.

Occasionally the visitors, annoyed by the number of mendicants, hastened through them into the church, but usually some kindly faces would look down into Linda's, voices would speak about her in strange, uncouth tongues, someone would ask her a question in ugly, outlandish Italian, gloved fingers would pat her cheek gently and place a coin in her hand. She had a little bag tied by a string around her neck, into which she put her earnings.

One American lady, alighting from a luxurious motor-car, kissed her and gave her a whole bright franc. There was no question but that she made as much as all the other beggars put together. When her mother came for her in the evening and realised that the bag

contained as much as she could earn by three days' labour, she treated Linda like a princess and bought her a sausage for supper.

Before a week was over the health of the child was manifestly improving; the warm air and the excitement of her begging, the interest and movement round her, made a happy change from the loneliness of her stuffy little attic. A slight colour in her cheeks made her prettier than ever; she unconsciously acquired a beguiling manner towards the foreigners who were charmed by her brightness in spite of her "affliction." In fact, Linda as a professional beggar was a distinct success.

Bernardo noticed this change in her appearance and wondered if the disease which kept her on her back were really incurable. Her mother was even afraid that the new-found source of wealth might disappear if the girl should grow so much stronger as to be able to stand upright and go to school like other children. But Linda, who had tasted life, formed her own plan.

"I want to ask the Lord Jesus to make me walk like other girls," she said. "I will ask Him at the festival when He is carried through the streets, and afterwards I will get up."

Her mother, illiterate and almost as ignorant as she, answered her roughly. "You will do nothing of the sort, you little fool," she said. "It is your work to seek alms of the rich foreigner. If you become like other girls, you would just die of starvation. Talk any more of getting up and you will not see the Lord at all, for I will leave you at home on His festival."

Linda wept, but kept her counsel. At Bernardo's next visit she asked his opinion. He recognised that perhaps after all it only needed a strong suggestion to heal her, though he was unwilling to encourage her to make an effort that might be dangerous. Preoccupied as he was with his own struggle, he did not realise that the child had determined to make the attempt.

The day of Corpus Domini dawned in rain and Linda's mother reluctantly decided that the girl would not be able to beg from the great crowd that would assemble in the square. But Linda was confident that it would be fine for the procession and so in the event it proved. They carried her out, radiant with expectation, just as all the bells of the city began to ring.

The streets were already strewn with boughs of box and the house-fronts draped with scarlet and purple hangings. The square was crowded with peasants who had come up from the country, and everyone, including the beggars, had on his best clothes. The men were dressed in bright blue for the most part; the girls and women wore variegated scarves over their heads and bright-coloured petticoats and bodices. Linda had a small pink ribbon in her hair.

The sun shone brightly as the procession passed down the steep streets from the Cathedral, with its glittering crosses and banners pictured with saints and inscribed with letters of gold. At the head of all marched a quaint old figure with a drum, a wizened master of the ceremonies who had led the same procession annually for as long as anyone could remember. After him came long lines of children belonging to various schools and institutions, the girls in

white with veils and wreaths, officered by sisters of mercy and nuns of various orders. Among them were three little mites dressed up in tinselled frocks of pink or pale blue muslin with fat bare arms, hair loose and battered pasteboard wings fastened to their small shoulders. Led by a woman whose perpetual scoldings indicated that her victims were unwilling even to pretend to be angelic, their quaint appearance and behaviour furnished immense delight to the spectators. The town band followed, playing gay operatic music, and then the numerous confraternities in brown cassocks and bright-coloured scapulars, carrying enormous painted standards and gilded crucifixes under gabled tabernacles of crimson damask. Images of saints and the Blessed Virgin swayed shoulder high in the midst of them, while after these walked a procession of priests and monks vested in mediæval copes out of the ancient treasuries and carrying lighted tapers, and finally under a golden canopy, preceded by the thurifers and the little bell, the sacred Host came into view, borne by the Bishop in Its monstrance.

Linda watched it all as in a dream. When everyone knelt down she could see more clearly; suddenly she called out in a shrill voice: "O Lord Jesus, O Lord Jesus!"

Her mother started up from her knees and leaned over the bed. "Be silent!" she whispered fiercely. But Linda was sitting up and staring with all her eyes.

Her mother threw a rug over the child's face and violently pushed her back, pinching her to enforce obedience. Bernardo walking among the priests before the Blessed Sacrament recognised the childish voice,

and, glancing up, alone of all the crowd took in the meaning of the little conflict. Then the pageant with the Sacred Host passed on in a glitter and mist of incense, taper-lights, rose-petals showered from the windows and gilded crosses flashing in the sunlight, while little Linda, her cries smothered in the blanket, wept in vain for her lost hopes.

Her mother smiled triumphantly; not even the Lord should interfere with a poor woman's livelihood.

II

That evening after the procession while Bernardo was loitering with Girolamo on the small square terrace just outside the courtyard gate, a party of foreigners, descending from the city to visit the convent, appealed to the two friars to save them from the annoyance of a gang of barefoot children that had persistently beset them. Girolamo energetically scolded the offenders, who scampered away to repeat their experiment on the next party of tourists at a safer distance.

"Their parents should be obliged to send them to school," remarked Bernardo after he had directed the tourists to the chapel.

"The Municipality should give them little prizes for attendance," said Girolamo. "By playing and begging on the road they get halfpennies; they will not go for nothing to the school."

"Yet it is terrible to think of children in these days growing up for all their lives illiterate."

"Certainly; but they can't understand that, nor their

parents either," said Girolamo. "For example, I have always found that the children will come to catechism classes if one gives them enough little pictures. Look!" he went on, producing from his pocket a number of small cards with gaudy saints and doll-like angels printed on them. "If they are very good, they get a pretty coloured one like this; if not so good, a plain one; but always something. That is the reason why they come."

"Ah! Why do the people come to church?" Bernardo asked him. "How far do you think that it is merely for the sake of the show, the processions, the music — in fact, the coloured pictures? But all the same, I wish you would give me some of these for a child in need of consolation."

Girolamo asked him to come up to his cell to get them and together they went round the cloister and mounted the narrow stairs. Bernardo noticed how short of breath his companion became while climbing those few steps; he felt a thrill of remorse at having said anything to hurt him.

When they reached the cell, he looked in through the open door with amazement. Covering the floor were pots full of earth, a green sprout here and there visible within them, and ranks of bottles of every shape containing bulbs in water. Both bottles and pots were decorated with coloured paper frills, with scraps of bright-hued ribbon and stars or rings cut out of silver foil. Girolamo was not in the least abashed at another seeing this childish parade.

"Did you see that little mite I dressed up as St. Gabriel?" he asked with a twinkle in his quaintly

pretty eyes. "I wonder if anyone came to the festival to see that little picture! She was the sweetest thing in the whole procession and I made the wings and all!" Then, handing Bernardo a selection of his coloured cards he added gravely: "It is few indeed that come to God for God's sake only, Bernardo."

III

As the long days went by Bernardo grew more and more impatient with the opportunities that his present life afforded, a few sermons, an occasional mission to a country parish, advice to a handful of penitents, the watching of a small flock of sheep already in the fold. He longed for action that at least would quicken the spiritual flame of faith in his own soul.

It was in this mood that he associated himself with a movement among a small number of Assisi ladies to alleviate the lot of the little flower-sellers and beggar-girls who grew up totally illiterate and ignorant of any work or trade and thus often eventually drifted into the brothels of great cities. Partly in order to impose humiliation on his own reserved but restive spirit he forced himself to enter the houses of people unknown to him in order to beg assistance for this work.

He would call at the great empty palace of the descendants of some family whose name had been bound up with the turbulent history of the city for perhaps a thousand years. He would climb their stately but neglected stairways to wait in spacious painted rooms encumbered with heavy furniture, re-

minding him of his old home in Milan by the same atmosphere of ancient dignity degraded by the false taste of more recent days, the same crude colours, ugly photographs of ugly people, the stuffed birds and artificial flowers in glass cases. He would explain his scheme to the people of the house, who usually discussed it sympathetically, but inconclusively, for an hour. Bernardo knew only too well that with estates and houses burdened by innumerable mortgages, as the result of the wild extravagance of the Assisan nobility a century ago, they could not help him lavishly. Unfortunately he had to learn that many were too proud to offer the small sums they could afford.

In one house he interviewed a young anti-clerical advocate who, barely refraining from personal insult, entered upon a tirade against the priests because the work had not been done before. He declared that, being a socialist, he desired to see justice done to all in a general redistribution of the nation's wealth, but that he would take no part in supporting a mere palliative, which would assuredly be used for clerical propaganda. His elder brother, a burly landowner, entering as Bernardo left, said that an industry ought to be started in the city and suggested making soap or tallow candles.

From the shopkeepers Bernardo asked for remnants of old stock to be used as prizes in a charitable lottery; from all sympathisers he requested information with regard to others who might help. In this manner he acquired an instructive insight into the internal economic condition of the city. It appeared

that a large part of the inhabitants lived by an elaborate system of borrowing, mortgaging and pawning, so that in most cases their liabilities amounted to sums absurdly in excess of their so-called possessions. Occasionally they raised money upon the security of one another's notes of hand. He found that casual workers, such as guides, musicians, drivers, men-of-all-trades and parasites of all descriptions existed out of all proportion to their opportunities of employment. It was the children of these helpless people that he desired to save.

But Bernardo for all his courtesy frightened more than charmed. In approaching strangers shyness made him blunt and awkward, reserve rendered his manner cold even towards genuine sympathy. Too austere when women smiled, too restrained in gratitude, at times he seemed almost haughty in his self-humiliation. In one house which he entered during a short but heavy shower, a woman, bitterly aggrieved at his request for alms, poured out a long harangue of insult. Having heard her out, for all reply he thanked her gravely for the shelter of her roof, and went forth into the rain. Altogether, although after nearly a week of begging he had collected but little money with a few promises of alms in kind as the various harvests of the land around should be gathered, in the attainment of his further purpose of voluntary self-abasement he had proved far more successful.

He would have wished to seek it until his pride was blunted; but his comrades at the convent, observing with dismay the notoriety his conduct was attracting, informed the Guardian, whereupon the per-

mission for his begging was withdrawn. He was thrown back once more into the theatre of interior struggle, a stricken battlefield of secret Powers which he could neither fathom nor control.

IV

Somewhere he had read and noted down the following sentence: "It rests with each one of us by an act of will to create the sort of world to which we shall accommodate our thought and action." Looking back on his own life he knew that he had chosen and created a world in which the thought of God predominated, had seized upon the highest ideal in his experience and made it the keystone of his dome of life. He had vowed himself to the pursuit of the highest spiritual beauty, and emphasised that *amor intellectualis Dei*, which was the inspiration of all that was best in his boyhood.

But since Orlando's visit he recognised with a new force how rapidly the creed he loved was losing for other men its intimate reality, and this knowledge reacted on his personal faith. He saw how to-day the world was waking from the vision that once was as true for it even as life itself; he understood this now because he shared its disillusion.

"Yet what is it to thee," he cried, "how the great world lives and moves, what the great world thinks? Wretch! Here is thy world which thou hast made for thyself wherein to praise God; do it with that little which thou hast! If He, who gave thee life, put out thine eyes and stopped thine ears, living in

darkness and silence, of what wouldst thou have to complain?"

Remembering all his spiritual privileges, he was wrung with shame for his discontent. To stifle the voice of restless question, he renewed his practices of mental discipline. He drilled his thoughts with tasks and penances, chosen for their exacting tediousness; during his waking leisure hours he allowed himself hardly a moment's rest. Day after day he fought his doubts till again and again the victory seemed to be assured; while night after night he poured out his heart in prayer, kneeling for hours in the darkness, and at times was rewarded with a new illumination that came in shafts of rapturous intuition, when the truth of his faith shone far brighter and clearer than any rational conviction.

But these shining moods were transient and brought reaction of barren restlessness, when he fretted as though against the bars of a cage. There began within his soul an inexplicable oscillation from heights of joy and freedom to depths of fretful pain and disillusion. At times the thought of God so ruled him that he burned to speak and preach to everyone he met and listened impatiently to talk of trivial worldly things. At other times he was so dead in faith that he could not understand how his comrades had the heart to talk at all or follow the treadmill of the daily office, which then seemed to him lifeless and devoid of purpose. The battle with his intellectual doubts had ushered in a far more awful struggle with a spiritual darkness, which, as the weeks went by, ever encompassed him more closely. Partly perhaps

it was due to the reaction of his companions' point of view on his own mind; he thought himself to be the outcast they would think him, if ever they should know his inmost thoughts. But it was inherent in this state of mind that he should not understand it; it seemed to him to be the loss of his soul's life.

"Blessed is the man whom Thou dost prevent so lovingly that Thou lettest him nowhere have rest till he seek his rest in Thee alone." Bernardo had rested hitherto in the thought of God, but not in God Himself. There had been "illumination" but not "unity." He had felt that he had chosen God; he did not know as yet how God had chosen him.

CHAPTER IV.

A DESERTER

I

THE spring passed into summer when man and beast warred with the sun. The plain grew yellow with the ripening wheat, while scattered over it, the countless elms and mulberries, bearing their garlands of vine, appeared as green embroideries upon a cloth of gold. All through the noonday heat the cicadas clipped their little limbs together with a noise like the opening and shutting of innumerable fairy scissors. By night the fireflies wove their dazzling maze, mocking the steadier splendour of the stars.

At the end of June the corn was cut and with it passed away the glittering swarm. But the vines hung richer from tree to tree; the figs grew sleeker and burst open, strewing the ground after each thunder shower. Day after day the storms gathered, broke with terrific fury and rolled away, while the church-bells clashed to avert the thunderbolts. The citizens slept in the midday hours and walked abroad in the evenings after the rain. The shadows seemed sharper, the roads whiter, the peasants browner and Father Tomaso drowsier at Vespers.

About the time of the wheat harvest Bernardo as Confessor to the novices, was confronted with the

instance in a weaker spirit of a cruder form of the same struggle as his own. A student, Luigi Carocci, known in the convent as Brother Rufino, being already "professed" but still awaiting ordination, after dallying for some weeks with the thought of liberty, confessed one day, half in rebellion, half contrition, his doubts and longings for the world.

"More and more I think of the lives of other men and envy them. I keep on asking myself 'What for? What for?' Isn't it possible to enjoy life here and go to Heaven all the same?"

"But all that you were giving up was explained to you before you took the vows?" Bernardo questioned. "I suppose you were then certain in your mind of the reality of your vocation?"

"I don't remember what I thought of my vocation then," the youth answered nervously, pulling the knots of his cord. "This merely seemed to me my part in life, my fate."

"What did you think of during all the hours when you were earnestly enjoined to examine your heart?"

"I said the rosary and counted the time till the monotonous silence should be over. One cannot pray or think more earnestly because one is told to. I was only confused and frightened. I watched for signs from Heaven in trifles or thought vaguely of anything else I could do if I didn't enter the Order."

"But at least you acted freely, knowing what you did? No one forced or influenced your will?"

"I don't think one ever acts freely all one's life or ever knows entirely what one is doing," the youth retorted. "One is forced by one's thoughts of the

moment and by one's surroundings. I don't believe in Free Will any more."

"Let us set aside the larger question," said Bernardo gravely. "What has so changed your habit of mind of late? Have you been visiting your brothers frequently?"

Bernardo knew well that the Carocci were prosperous peasants holding a farm upon the plain not far from San Damiano. He knew them all by sight, the old father and mother and the two married sons, for they had often come to Benediction at the convent on their way home from their Sunday visits to Assisi. For their class they occupied a good position, being known and respected for many miles around. By their industry and thrift they had saved sufficient money to purchase their land from their master, an impoverished noble; having seen which desire of his life accomplished the old *métayer* had been gathered to his fathers and had been followed to the cemetery by a procession of several hundred mourners carrying tapers.

By immemorial custom on an Umbrian farm when the two elder sons decide to marry and to stay upon the land, the third son is usually obliged to leave the paternal roof or to remain a bachelor. For the number of hands required for the work and the number of mouths the produce will support are calculated and established by tradition. The Carocci parents, being strongly religious, had earnestly desired that their youngest son, Luigi, should become a friar, and accordingly the boy had been educated as a Franciscan novice at San Damiano. The superiority of his fu-

ture position to that of the rest of his family had been so constantly impressed upon him that he had never frankly considered any alternative manner of life.

But since his father's death his elder brothers had become infected with the epidemic of materialism that was sweeping over the land and had joined an agricultural society, the ulterior purpose of which was the extermination of the Christian faith among the peasantry. Their younger brother's increased freedom since his profession and his visit to his old home on the occasion of a sister's marriage had furnished them with opportunities of influencing his mind. The ostentation at the wedding festival had given the youth a different impression of peasant circumstances from that which he had known in his father's thriftier days; while, on the other hand, in place of being honoured by his kinsfolk, he had found that a friar may be despised. He had been chaffed about his ignorance of life and made to eat and drink excessively. Bernardo saw from his story and the manner of its telling that he was one of those weak youths who by habitual silence, which suggests solidity, conceal their innate vanity and shallowness of heart. He reasoned with him, gave him counsel, and after forbidding him to revisit his family, dismissed him with an injunction to pray for that faith, for which he perceived the youth had no desire.

Thenceforward Carocci came no more to him for confession, but after seeing his brothers frequently and surreptitiously, suddenly returned to his home without permission, leaving a note for the Guardian, in which he renounced his vows.

II

So it came about that one evening in the beginning of July there was a vacant place in the choir at matins, at supper in the refectory and in the dormitory at night, a gap in the ranks opened by a deserter to the insidious onset of the world. The Guardian's face was worn and troubled, forbidding question; consternation and indignant scorn embittered the comments of the other fathers. Bernardo, forced to express an opinion, took up the youth's defence.

"He had no vocation," he said; "it is far better that he should go."

"No vocation?" cried Domenico. "Then why did he take the vows? I cannot understand how a man in his full senses can be so sure at one time and then in a few months or years go back on all that he has promised and believed. It is utterly incomprehensible."

"In former years I suppose he would never have doubted," answered Bernardo. "But personality to-day is far more complex. It is so hard to walk straight forward, when at every step we are self-criticised. The vows have acquired a new terror; since by them to-day a man must bind not only himself as he thinks he is at one moment, but all the thousand other selves that soon he well may be."

"I am afraid I cannot agree with you," replied Domenico coldly. "Truth is single; a man has a vocation or he has not, and the methods of examination enjoined by the Church decide that question once and for ever. When a man has taken the vows, all these

other 'selves' you speak of are the suggestions of the devil, plotting ruin to the soul. Mark my words, Carocci's future life will prove the truth of my contention."

The other friars standing round assented.

The next few weeks justified the prophecy. Swaggering in lay dress in the market-place on festivals, drinking in wine-shops and ostentatiously proclaiming his hatred of the Order, Carocci became a perpetual storm-centre of anti-clerical agitation on the part of the worst elements of the city.

III

About three weeks after this occurrence in the course of one of the long walks through the fields which he loved to take in the hours of recreation, Bernardo, finding himself near the Carocci's farm, determined, if possible, to speak to Luigi and to warn him of the consequences that would follow his misconduct. Approaching the house, a large low building with a row of poplars close beside it, he noticed that in re-white-washing the walls the sons had painted out the old Madonna over the door. He passed the lofty gate-posts, wreathed with clematis, walked up the broad green track between the vines, and waited for a moment before the house. He could hear the oxen champing in their stable under the stone staircase leading to the living rooms; a dog barked at him from beyond the strawricks; a few chickens scuttled to the dung-heaps; a couple of pigeons flapped away to the piles of brush-wood,

stacked in the fork of a large elm; a handful of brown, bare-legged children came out of a shed to stare; the peasants working in the fields beyond glanced up, exchanged a word, but took no further notice of the visitor.

Bernardo mounted the flight of steps and called aloud, looking into the house through the open door. The chief living-room of the farm was clean and spacious; bright coppers hung on the distempered walls; dressers, laden with earthenware, stood between old wooden presses, tables and benches; a large black cauldron simmered on the open hearth; the cat lay asleep upon a chair. The young peasant proprietors were prospering.

Suddenly while the friar waited on the threshold there was a little cry and a poor old woman tottered out towards him. Her thin grey hair was flying loose from under her scarf, her petticoats were looped up around her, revealing her bare feet and ankles. Tremblingly she seized Bernardo's hand and kissed it.

"Oh, Madonna mia!" she cried; "my poor Luigi! Is it certain that he will go to Hell? Thank God his father died before this day! These sons of mine, who would have thought that I had reared them?"

Bernardo did his best to soothe her, pressing her thin palsied hands. "Can I speak to him for a moment quietly?" he asked.

"Luigi! Luigi! Come hither!" the old woman cried in a loud shrill voice hardly to be expected from so weak a frame. Then with a sudden change of tone: "You won't do him any harm, will you?" she

whispered, as though she feared that he might put a spell or curse upon her son. "Yet he deserves all that the good Lord can give him," she went on angrily. "His father and I have always desired that he should be a friar, to pray for our souls after we had gone. But instead he has brought disgrace upon us all! But he is not fitted for our life here—he cannot do our work. Last night I heard him sobbing in his bed, poor dear! But Gianni heard him too and gave him wine and argued with him. They made him drunk and had to carry him back to his bed. That's how they are, these sons of mine. Luigi! Luigi!" she called out again.

Muttering under his breath her eldest son came forward. He wore a blue blouse spattered with the sulphate of copper, with which he had been dressing the vines. His feet were bare and covered with clay, his blue drill trousers turned up to below the knee. He had a rough bristly beard and a black hat tilted on the back of his head.

"Go in, mother," he said gruffly, "this is my affair."

He was determined to prevent Bernardo from speaking to Luigi alone; perhaps in his mind also was a superstitious hatred of a priest. The other peasants gathered round curiously to listen, the last to come being the young ex-friar, who hung about behind the rest, as though frightened or ashamed. The mark of his tonsure was still visible upon his close-cropped skull.

"Don't think you'll get hold of him again," cried the second Carocci with bravado. "He has had

enough of your psalms and all the rest of the make-believe. He doesn't think any more about your saints and your Hosts, for he is become a sensible man."

"Be quiet, Gianni!" bade the elder brother. "Let us hear what the friar has to say!"

"I have not come to be insulted," said Bernardo. "There has been enough of that since Luigi left the convent. It is to put a stop to it that I have come. Luigi's conduct in the city is a scandal and an incitement to all the worst characters. You are simply debauching him on account of his comparative innocence. You know as well as I do that if he stays here, he can come to no good. Why should he not emigrate as so many others are doing?"

The two brothers whispered together for a minute.

"Come, can't we strike a bargain?" said the elder. "What if you made him a present and he promised never to go up to Assisi on festivals?"

"If you are so afraid of the stories he may tell of you," added the other, "it is only right that you should pay him to hold his tongue."

Bernardo turned towards the youth. "I solemnly warn you, Luigi Carocci," he cried sternly, "that if you continue to act as you have been acting lately, you will be excommunicated by the Church. I think you know what that means. There will be no second warning."

The youth stood pale and motionless for a moment; he glanced nervously at his companions and tried to draw his dry lips into a smile.

Without another word the Franciscan turned and strode away. The old mother fell on her knees and

burst into a storm of sobs and passionate invocations of the Madonna. A young woman giggled rudely, the elder men shrugged their shoulders, spat and returned to their work.

Bernardo, as he hurried homewards along the dusty road, heard neither the workers singing in the fields nor the small birds twittering in the elms. He thought bitterly of the change that was creeping over the land. In the towns and villages it was spreading faster; more slowly among the farms. Families, such as the Carocci, though still, he thought, exceptional, were none the less sure symptoms of the times.

Perhaps the new order was inevitable, but need it be so sordid and contemptuous of the past? A more productive agricultural system had dissolved the spell of tradition; the peasants had lost their faith in the wisdom of their fathers' ways. Emigration and travel in more prosperous lands had weakened the affection which hallows the familiar, that is, the glamour of home. Secular education had disclosed to them the excitement of cheap newspapers, which appealed to their worst instincts with sensational reports of murder, lust and violence, and blasphemous articles against religion. Co-operative societies and masonic lodges disseminated practical knowledge with hatred of the Church. Sadly Bernardo reflected that the people who lived in the old dream were disenchanted.

"Passing away," he thought, "is the old dignity, the family tradition, the system wherein each man had his place and part. Dead will be soon the old associations, the old customs, the bonfires in the fields

on the eve of the great festivals, the processions and pilgrimages from church to church, when whole villages marched singing through the lanes in May, the christenings, weddings, masses, funerals with hundreds of mourners carrying tapers. Fading slowly, yet inevitably, is the devotion to the old saints and their gentle legends, the restraining thought of their sympathy, the inspiring thought of their help. Lost will be at length the old faith, the old consolations, the glow and loveliness of the real, the interior, spiritual Kingdom, bartered away for a small material gain! A little more money, a new chemical manure and a more productive system of agriculture; meat once a week instead of twice a year; the lie that happiness is merely physical comfort. A few crude notions of geography, history and popular science, impregnated with atheistic bias; the habit of reading sensational newspapers, always scurrilous, often obscene; the pretence of thinking for oneself, the pride of independence; the vanity of that little finite knowledge which ignores its infinite ignorance!" Bernardo's heart was heavy with foreboding for the future of that ideal, to which he had dedicated his life.

On his way homeward to the city he paused at a certain cross-roads before a little shrine that was decked with innumerable votive offerings; with metal hearts and scapulars; with crutches, sticks and waxen limbs in token of miraculous healings; with small glass lamps and withered flowers, together with cards and scraps of paper, recording in faded writing graces that once were granted here. The shrine was known

through all the country-side as the "Madonna of the Little Rags."

Half a mile further down the road he passed another shrine in a new commune. The plaster on the walls was scarred by stones, the glass lamp shattered and the fresco of the Madonna desecrated. It stood as a boundary mark of this new progress on the frontiers of the Kingdoms of the old God and the new.

IV

The flight of Carocci had not taken place without recoil upon the minds of many in the convent. A gate had been set ajar which everyone had hitherto regarded as for ever closed. There were many heart-searching enquiries into the meaning of the vocation for religious life, even in the minds of those who for years had put the thought of the world aside. For some there were sleepless nights, for others hours of wondering and suspicion, when it was feared that the faith of this or that father was unsure. The intimacy and unity of the spiritual life in the community made every slightest shock vibrate through the whole body. There were tacit questionings when eyes met and exchange of silent glances of encouragement and exhortation. The younger members of the community showed a temper of determination as of young soldiers in camp on the night before a battle. In the choir it was noticeable that some voices repeated the credo in a tone that was almost militant with emphasis.

The elder fathers regarded the revival with obvious disquiet. Tomaso sighed piously as he peered out of

the corners of his eyes at the fervour of certain younger brethren in the opposite stalls. There seemed to him to be no reason to sing any louder or to pronounce the verses of the Office any more distinctly because a wretched fellow had apostatised and made surer of Hell than ever. It annoyed him that since these younger voices had begun to dominate, the psalms were read more slowly, and matins, for instance, occupied quite five minutes longer. Also their fervour seemed to make him hot.

Tomaso, also a man of peasant origin, had entered the Order at the age of fourteen and knew little of life outside the convent walls. Within the limits of the Rule he was the convent gossip. He watched his neighbours and their smallest acts had for him supreme importance. He was the confessor of a convent of nuns in the city and his journeys up the hill to say his Mass and hear confessions and down the hill again for dinner were almost the only physical exercise he ever took. As a spiritual director he discouraged all excesses as tending to nourish pride, which, whether spiritual or intellectual, was the greatest of all mortal sins in his opinion. For this reason he was suspicious of every slight departure from the usual convent tone.


Girolamo had not noticed the change until Tomaso called his attention to it. According to Tomaso it was rank arrogance on the part of some of the novices that they should wish to make their voices heard. Girolamo listened more carefully and, rejecting Tomaso's explanation, decided that if the Lord had been pleased to quicken the hearts of the younger

ones, that was a gift which should be rather a cause of thankfulness than of suspicion, and so he told Tomaso.

At another time Filippo drew him aside in the garden and whispered that the convent was seething with infidelity. In the matters of religion especially, Filippo was an alarmist; he now exaggerated the cause of his trepidation to Girolamo, unconsciously enjoying it.

But Girolamo simply could not believe in it. Usually when anyone spoke to him of infidelity he would answer cheerfully: "Well, we shall all be converted by our sister Death." Girolamo was always so quick to smile away another's fears that he seldom gave himself the time to understand them.

On the other hand, Father Silvestro, the Guardian of the convent, recognised a subtle change in the spiritual atmosphere, which might be pregnant with insidious dangers. Ever since the day when the encyclical "*Pascendi Dominici Gregis*" had startled him by its denunciation of heresies and errors, of which he had never heard before and which now he did not understand, he had been obediently vigilant to detect and suppress he did not know exactly what. He had pondered for many hours over the meaning of such doctrines as Divine Immanence, Vital Emanation and what the Encyclical called "the Transfiguration and Disfiguration of Phenomena," in order that he might more easily detect them, until he began to be afraid lest his own faith should be poisoned by the virus of such pernicious heresies, whereupon he promptly gave up the enquiry. He had become more



careful of giving such dispensations to the younger members of the community as might afford them opportunities of discussing religious matters with outsiders, and more scrupulous as to the literature that found its way into the convent. Now at the present crisis he sent for Bernardo, who was the confessor of the novices, and asked him if he saw any reason to suspect there was any diffusion of the infidelity of that miserable young man Carocci.


Bernardo for the last few weeks had been so absorbed in his own struggle that he had hardly devoted any thought to the change that he dimly perceived to be going on around him. The anxiety of the Guardian filled him with remorse. Infidelity? He only knew too well in his own mind the battle with doubt and rebellion. His heart went out in pity to those who were younger and weaker than himself and assailed by the same temptations. If his peace had been so broken by a glimpse of wider realms of thought through converse with one who had read and travelled freely, had not the faith of others been distressed by yearning at the vistas of the larger fields of industry seen through the opened door of the broken vow by which Carocci had escaped? He was ashamed that he had forgotten to pray for them. He answered the Guardian vaguely and promised he would watch.

The Guardian noticed the self-accusing thrill and misinterpreted the reticence. Was it possible that this the most intellectual and spiritual mind in the community was infected with the evil that so afflicted the Holy Father? Father Silvestro, with all his

largeness of heart and administrative wisdom, had so little appreciation of the refinements of abstract thought that he could not conceive how anyone should incur the condemnation of the Church for the sake of such vague metaphysical distinctions as those at which the Encyclical was aimed. No man, he thought, would give up all that Bernardo had done in order to become a Modernist or half-believer. He dismissed the doubt from his mind and sat down to consider various estimates of the cost of repairing the convent roof.

V

Later on in the same day, a novice with a keen delicate face, Egidio by name, came to Bernardo to make his confession. All the students and novices confessed to Bernardo, the fathers either to Tomaso or Girolamo. Egidio accused himself of disobedience and infidelity. It appeared that Carocci, some days before he ran away had brought into the convent a paper copy of a popular edition of Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe," and showing it secretly first to one novice and then another, had dared them to read it. He said that they ought to have their eyes opened before they blindly gave up their lives. The novices were so sure of their faith that they laughed at him, but curiosity prompted them to accept his challenge. He tore up the book part by part and distributed it among them. They carried the pages under their habits and read them secretly, especially in the dormitory in the early morning, as soon as there was sufficient light.



"Oh! I cannot tell you, father, how terrible it was! We woke up one another and then set ourselves to grapple with what we felt was too strong for us. But we had promised to read the book, and none of us would be the first to confess that the arguments in it were more than he could answer. You see," he went on naively, twisting his long fingers, "we have always heard the question stated like this:—If God did not create the world, who did? What was the Primal Cause, if it was not God? The Universe could not have made itself. But in this book it says: 'The Universe always existed. We cannot conceive either a beginning or an end in time any more than a limit to space. The Universe has been from all eternity, changing and evolving and dissolving through nebular, solar and planetary life. There can be no such thing as a First Cause. Cause is only one side of an effect. The phrase involves a contradiction in terms.'"

"How many of you have shared in this?" Bernardo asked.

"Five. They will all confess it to you to-day."

"What have you done with this book?"

"I have destroyed it. When we had all finished it and the last sheaf of pages was passed round to me, I took it all down to a fire in the garden, where the peasants were burning rubbish, and threw it into the flames. But I cannot destroy the thoughts it has given me—no God, no Christ, no Madonna, no saints, only a void where worlds are perpetually evolving and dissolving, where life is springing up and dying out in a net of cruel laws! Oh, I wish I had

saved the book, perhaps you would have been able to answer it, if you had read it too."

"I have read it, years ago," answered Bernardo, smiling sadly as the thought of his boyhood's doubts entered his mind. But a light had come into the student's face.

"If you read it, father, before you took the vows, then you know how it can be answered!" he cried. "Oh, do not refuse to help us! Do not send us to our teachers, who will say it was the devil that inspired the book, but will not try to answer the arguments. I do not believe they can. Oh, father, we cannot be put off any longer by assertions that rest only upon proofs mutually dependent on each other. Will you not let us come and discuss it all with you, and listen fairly to our arguments? For the love of God, do not refuse to help us, father, for as for me, if you do, I must follow Carocci, and I have nowhere now to go!"

Sleepless nights had intensified the nervous agony into which ceaseless brooding and revolving of problems too hard for his mind had plunged him. His appeal was like the cry of a frantic soul upon the brink of Hell. Bernardo promised that with the Guardian's consent he would devote any suitable time to a discussion in which he would try to resolve their difficulties, reserving for the Guardian's judgment also the question of the penance for the disobedience of the novices.

Upon the following day the four other students confessed a similar tale to him, all apparently suffering the same doubts. Afterwards, with the permission

of his five penitents, Bernardo laid the whole matter before the Guardian, and for the next month, when the days of penance were over, every afternoon for an hour exposed to them the shallowness of the naturalistic scheme.

The students were not sure that they always understood the deep metaphysical reasoning of his lectures, but they knew that he gave them back their faith and that they loved him beyond any other living being on the earth.

It was easy enough for him to restore the intellectual sanction of faith to a band of frightened novices, who only wanted to believe. Their hearts cried out against the cruel synthesis of rigid laws that seemed to make them fools for having of their own will surrendered all worldly life. Whether he aided them or not, Bernardo believed that their fervent desire working unconsciously within their simpler minds would, as the recollection of the book grew fainter, have erected new defences for their faith and sufficient answer to the besieging problems. But his own trouble was far deeper than intellect; the very springs of his love of God and truth had failed.

This new departure from the conventual routine was not likely to pass without exciting jealousy and hostile comment. Father Domenico was enraged to find that certain students had desired to consult Bernardo upon their difficulties rather than remain content with his own lectures. He thought that they could derive no good from one who was certainly addicted to all the vague metaphysical subtleties of German idealism, if not to still less trustworthy

philosophy. What the students really needed was simple definite teaching upon sound commonsense principles. Tomaso agreed with him; Bernardo, he said, was far too neurotic, hypercritical and introspective to act as a teacher of novices.

Domenico and Tomaso together approached the Guardian and solemnly warned him of the unwisdom of his act.

"You miss the point," said Silvestro bluntly. "The young ones chose Bernardo. If I had sent them to you, you would doubtless have solved their problems as well as he or better; only they would not have chosen to be persuaded. They wish to be converted by Bernardo and Bernardo will oblige."

This was undoubtedly true, but did not appease Domenico. He believed it to be his duty to watch Bernardo closely, and together with Tomaso and Filippo, the other teacher, formed a tacit opposition, which fomented its unconscious hostility by a concordance of veiled hints and critical disparagements.

VI

The anti-clerical agitation, fed by the calumnies of Carocci, smouldered for some weeks, until the pronouncement of his excommunication, followed by a strong but impolitic article in a local newspaper, fanned it into a flame. The windows of the editors' houses were broken by a mob and anti-clerical processions paraded the town.

One evening Bernardo encountered one of these demonstrations issuing by a narrow street from the

central piazza just as he was approaching it. The procession consisted of about a hundred and fifty men and boys of the roughest class, headed by several teachers of the municipal schools. They had a couple of black and red banners bearing socialist inscriptions.

As they passed down the street, there were shouts of "Down with the Church!" "Down with the Madonna!" "Down with the Christ!" together with other blasphemies. Bernardo became like a man possessed in the intensity of his indignation. He flung himself into the midst of the procession, and found himself face to face with Carocci, who cried aloud some vile abuse of the Blessed Virgin as he approached.

Bernardo planted himself before him. "Be silent!" he cried.

The young man stopped, looked at him and could not withdraw his eyes from those of the Friar. There was an instant of intense struggle, before the youth's will suddenly gave way, the blood left his face, a glint of terror succeeded the look of arrogant bravado; he gave a sort of gulp and dropped on to the stones.


Bernardo heard a swell of angry exclamations behind him and thought for a moment that he would have his habit torn from him. But he did not pause. Looking straight before him, he walked on steadily through the mob, no one daring to oppose. He vaguely heard their cries and oaths. "No, no, he didn't touch him." "Was it fright?" "Who is it?" "What is it?" "That cursèd friar?" He walked

straight forward into the piazza, crossed it and entered the Church of the Minerva.

For an hour he knelt before the Blessed Sacrament in the cool twilight of the silent building, praying for the youth whom he had quelled. The violence of his action had suddenly released the nervous tension, cleaving the darkness of his soul for a brief hour of illumination.

Meanwhile enthusiasm had departed from the anti-religious demonstrators and their cries rang with a diminished ardour. The procession was shorn of a considerable part of its strength as some turned aside to escort their dazed and bewildered comrade, while the rest pursued their way with a fainter zeal at the thought of how one of their band had succumbed to that superstitious terror, the seed of which each felt was quickened in his heart.

As the story of the incident spread about Assisi it gained a new sensational detail at each telling. Bernardo attained a notoriety which he did not desire, and the personal animosity of a considerable party who watched for their revenge. Two weeks later Luigi Carocci left the country.



CHAPTER V

THE MISER'S HOARD

I


IN one of the oldest and largest of the many stately houses which in their neglected grandeur give to Assisi so much of its romantic charm, lived a certain old harridan, known as Donna Elisa Garlenda, whose anti-clerical spleen had long been the jest of her neighbours. Occupying a few squalid rooms at the top of her vast empty palace she was reported to be a miser, possessed of a secret hoard of untold wealth. She had harried her husband into his grave and quarrelled with all his relations. She haggled for the last penny with the peasants, who cultivated her estates and brought her their accounts on Sundays, making it a point of pride to cheat her as much as possible. In the streets she carried on a war of curses with every beggar that accosted her, and on all occasions proclaimed her hatred of priests and monks, saying they never came near her except when they wanted her money.

One evening, however, in the early spring she had chanced to enter the Church of the Minerva while Bernardo was preaching at Benediction. On his return to the Sacristy he received a note by the hand of her half-starved servant to say that she desired to

make her confession to him on the following day, which performance had consisted mainly of long digressions from her own sins to those of her late husband, her relations, servants and peasants towards herself, so that Bernardo had to stop her time and again on the point of bringing serious charges. Clearly her soul was as unused to the mood of penitence as her stiff old knees to the rigour of the confessional. Probably her motive had been mainly the desire for expression of self-pity. Afterwards, she had invited Bernardo to visit her, telling him that she hoped to forget that he was a friar, since at least he appeared to be a gentleman.

The first time he went to see her, she received him huddled up in a low chair, her wizened body wrapped in a blue flannel dressing-jacket with a crimson shawl on her shoulders, her mittened fingers clasping a small *scaldino* of hot wood ashes, her pinched old face with its large red nose and drooping mouth tied up in a yellow scarf. She explained that she had caught a chill in the church. Every chair and table in her crowded sitting-room was covered with packets of papers and letters, scraps of mending and old garments, the remnants of her last meagre meal being deposited in the midst of the litter. Apparently she cooked little dishes of cock-combs and portions of the inwards of animals, over a spirit lamp with the aid of dirty spoons. Her larder was the shelf of an open cupboard in which she kept her clothes.

At Bernardo's entrance she screamed to her servant to make ready a chair for the visitor, upon which it appeared that there was an elaborate system un-



derlying the seeming disorder, to preserve which it was of the highest importance that the various packets and piles of papers should not be mixed together. The old woman apologised to Bernardo while she abused the girl, remarking that she was always occupied because she had "to regulate everything herself." On her lap sat a small toy dog which yelped incessantly throughout the visit.

Bernardo found her to be a well-educated woman who had once held a good position in society and had met many of the principal figures of the epic age of Italy. She knew the French and German classics as well as the Italian, and it was of these Bernardo talked. But she preferred to tell him about the amours of royal princes and the society scandals of thirty years ago. He was almost stifled with disgust at the sordid meanness of her life, the dirt, the selfishness and bitter rancour; he could with difficulty restrain his scorn at the acrimony and cynicism of her tales. As her querulous talk went on he grew more silent; when he left her airless rooms he thought he could never enter them again.

But the second time he went he had a purpose; to ask her for the loan of a part of the lower story of her great empty house in which to hold the projected school for destitute beggar children. Donna Elisa had at first insulted him, believing that he came to beg, but eventually she had shown him several rooms that would suit his purpose, when she realised that she could demand a small monthly rent from the committee. Bernardo had haggled over the price with her in the cause of charity and thereby had increased

her respect for him, obtaining a reduction of her terms by one franc.

The little school once opened, Bernardo, as confessor to the children and the three Sisters of the Poor who kept it, had almost daily entered the lower portion of her house. The hours he spent in ministering in the humble chapel and in visiting the work-room where a dozen bare-legged little girls were patiently taught to knit themselves stockings for the winter and to clean and mend their rags, were his happiest moments of refreshment during those weary months.

On the next occasion, when he came to pay the rent, he found Donna Elisa in a virulent mood raving over some imaginary injury to herself which she thought that a cousin of her late husband had inflicted.

"That is just what I expected from his father's son," she cried, darting to a pile of papers in a corner. "The insults I endured from that man! This is what he said to my cousin Giacomo about my relations with my husband! This is a letter from my niece Giulia about that horrible calumny he started! This —"

"You don't mean to say that you keep written records of all these miserable things?" the friar interrupted.

"Indeed I do! I have them all. It isn't likely that I shall ever forget. This is the record of Eustachio Cirenei, who has been in Hell these ten years past, and now I shall start a packet for his son.

It will soon be a good pile if he goes on as he has begun!"

The packets of letters and papers were the records of all the petty injuries and insults she had received or imagined throughout her life. She lived day and night amid the memorials of her grievances. Bernardo's spirit sank within him; he threw the money he had brought upon the table, obtained the receipt in silence and left her without a word. For days he pondered how to break this net of hatred that was strangling the wretched woman's soul.

The chance came unexpectedly in the beginning of July on a day when it was once more necessary for him to visit Donna Garlenda about a trifling matter of business connected with the school. He heard from the nuns that the old woman had recently been ill, but had refused to send for a doctor on account of the expense. As the servant opened the door of her sitting-room, Bernardo saw her seated at her table, reading over and sorting once again the piles of letters and papers relating to her family. A tall candle flickering before her showed him her drawn features and the hectic spots of feverish excitement burning upon her thin grey cheeks, while she turned over the soiled pages with her trembling hands.

Bernardo watched her steadily, reading Death written in her face and knew that he must make an effort instantly to awaken her from her miserable dream of avarice and revenge. On her part, when she saw him, she started guiltily and seemed inclined to drive him out with insults.

He waited in silence, gazing at her until the servant had closed the door, then with the strange dramatic violence characteristic of his strongest actions all through life, he asked her to say a Paternoster with him. Her mouth dropped with amazement at so unexpected a request and there was a sullen pause before the authority of his manner forced her into obedience. When they reached the "*sicut et nos dimittimus*," he stopped.

"Do you expect God to blot out *your* sins?" he asked sternly, pointing to the papers on the table.

She burst into an angry self-defence, but he interrupted: "Come, you must burn all these, here, now, at once!" and without waiting for her reply he rolled up the shabby tablecloth, sweeping together the innumerable papers lying on it.

"Is there anything here that belongs to anyone else, or has any intrinsic value in itself?" he asked.

Donna Elisa gasped, but shook her head; she seemed to be cowed by his assumption of power. He felt a thrill of pity for her, but he would not let it divert him from his purpose. He knew that this must be the first step to save her from her mania of hate.

He carried the bundle into her kitchen, and sent the servant away into another room, closing the door behind her. Then he threw the papers on to the fireless hearth and shook out the packets loosely. Donna Elisa had followed him, muttering incoherently; she was frightened by his determination and the sternness of his face.

"We must begin the Paternoster again," he said. They repeated it together to the end. "Out of your

own lips you will be judged. There are your debts to God! Do you mean to destroy them or shall they destroy your soul?"

He left her suddenly, went back to the little sitting-room, knelt down by the table and prayed. Nearly an hour passed. He heard the bells of the Ave Maria, saw the light fade from the sky, but he did not move from his knees. At length the door from the kitchen opened and a little bent figure tottered towards him, a small leather bag in her hand.

"Here! Take this!" she whispered. "It is for your children, for the school below here!" Then with a sudden change of manner she burst out almost angrily: "Go! Go at once! Oh, you have ruined me!"

Bernardo arose from his knees, making the sign of the cross over her as he took the bag from her. Going out, he brushed against Donna Elisa's servant, who was crouching down to listen at the keyhole.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, he took the money into the school on the lower floor of the palace. The children had gone home and the nuns were preparing their own supper. Together they opened the black bag and counted out its contents by the light of an oil lamp upon the kitchen table. It held several canvas bags of coin, gold, silver, and copper, thick packets of notes in value varying from five to five hundred lire, and finally a small pocketbook with ten notes, each to the value of a thousand.

The sisters had never seen so much money in their lives; they were almost afraid of it. Between them they arranged in piles the smaller notes and coins, and found that the whole sum amounted to thirteen thou-

sand, two hundred and forty-five francs. It was the old miser's secret hoard, the rumour about the existence of which Bernardo had never believed.

"Perhaps it is a mistake," said the younger nun faintly.

"It is the hand of God," said the elder; "our school is founded."

The next day Bernardo went once more to Donna Garlenda's house to ascertain if she really intended to give so large a sum. As soon as she saw him she cried out wildly:

"Why do you come here again? Do you imagine you will get any more? Or do you think I am going to die?"

Bernardo reminded her of the amount of her gift. "Do you suppose I don't know that as well as you? But don't you mention this thing to anyone! I don't want to have all the beggars in the town knocking at my door." Then suddenly she turned upon him and demanded: "Are you not going to give me back my bag?"

Bernardo asked her if she would not come and see the work that her gift would go far to perpetuate.

"Why should I wish to come and see a pack of dirty children?" was her answer, but, nevertheless, she followed him. At the door she stopped and whispered:

"What am I to do now all day long? You have taken away everything I had, and there is nothing left for me but to die as quickly as possible."

"Perhaps I can give you something better far than anything you have had before," replied Bernardo, as

he led the way into the school. He showed her the chapel, the workroom and the kitchen, explaining all that the sisters hoped to do with her money; but he saw she was not listening. The nuns greeted her with infinite protestations of gratitude, but she only scowled at them and said impatiently:

"I have come for my black leather bag; I don't want to hear your chatter."

The empty bag restored to her, she hobbled upstairs without speaking. She went back to her squalid life with its filthy and ungracious ways, mending her garments, cooking her messes, abusing her peasants and the priests as before. If Bernardo ever imagined that she would fill her old heart by taking interest in the destitute children which her hoard would clothe and feed, he was entirely mistaken. Perhaps she had never had a heart.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARDON OF ST. FRANCIS

I

THE last days of July brought the great annual festival of the pardon of St. Francis, when the pilgrims from all parts of central and southern Italy flock to Assisi to gain the plenary indulgence granted by Pope Honorius. For three days and nights the streets of the city are thronged with an excited crowd of peasants, who sleep and eat in the cloisters and the open spaces, tying up the weary beasts that possibly have dragged them for weeks upon the roads.

For three days the city resembles the deck of an immense ship, thronged with emigrants; its prow the high Basilica of St. Francis, its poop the domed Cathedral of San Rufino; a ship of faith, whereof the crew are priests and the passengers are human souls bound through a sea of sin for the ports of Paradise. The great church of St. Mary of the Angels is like a pinnacle sailing by the larger ship; the convents scattered round the city — San Damiano, Rivo Torto and the Carceri — are as little boats full of sailors clustering round to aid. For three days the small fleet tosses in the tempest, sings, shouts, prays, preaches, converts, exhorts, absolves — and saves men's souls.

Bernardo with the other friars was busy at the

Angels listening to numberless confessions, outpourings of repentant hearts of every age and in almost every dialect. He heard the story of hatreds, injuries and quarrels, tragedies of lust, cruelty and violence in the swarming slums of Naples, in isolated mountain hamlets of the Abruzzi, in fishing villages upon the Adriatic or Tyrrhenian sea. The cumulative pathos of these tales was overwhelming. They were not narrated so coherently that he could clearly understand them, but were all the more pitifully suggestive by reason of the blunt compression of their telling.

There came women who abased themselves and implored his absolution, as though in abject terror of future penalties of sin; men who spoke with defiance and bravado, as though confession were an act of condescension rather than of penitence; children who whimpered of small faults so indistinctly that after making them repeat thrice over the confessor could only guess one-half of what they said. Others, who had not been to confession for they forgot how many years, apparently looked to this miracle-working pilgrimage to purge that little of soul which was left to them after a lifetime of heedless wickedness. One man threatened personal vengeance, when Bernardo refused to give him absolution; another explained that he had come to confess because his wife had requested him to do so; he wanted to give her pleasure; she had been a good wife to him; he hoped the kind father as a favour would not keep him long. To more than one the habit of blasphemy was so inveterate that they filled in gaps of their tales with oaths.

It was only after eight hours that Bernardo was re-

lieved from his post at the confessional. He walked out into the wide open place before the church. Under the plane-trees on the trampled grass were erected rows of booths for the sale of bright-coloured calicoes and kerchiefs, of cakes and cooked food in variety, of fruit and syrup-flavoured water, of innumerable trinkets and religious objects. He noticed cheap rosaries and crucifixes hanging beside long horns of coral and other charms against the evil eye. One man was bawling his nostrums for all conceivable diseases, another striving to shout him down with bags containing holy dust and relics to hang round the neck. Scattered groups of the crowd were idly listening to the patter of various hawkers of dress stuffs, of patent pencils, of ribbons, ties, buttons and ornamental pins. Tumblers and acrobats were performing to dense circles of spectators; two men from the Abruzzi were singing lustily a wild dramatic ballad of their village; hard by a dance was going on to the strains of an accordion; farther off, a hot dispute, perhaps a fight. On all sides men in twos and threes were arguing about the value of their cattle and the bargains they had made at the fair; others stood drinking or playing at morra; a group of boys sitting in a shady corner wrangled over a game of cards. Children were running hither and thither; infants were fed at the breast by tired mothers resting on the grass.

Bernardo walked among the crowd for a few minutes and then turned back into the church. Within and without alike the noise and heat were inconceivable. All the great doors were open to the sunlight and the wide white nave was packed with people in a

stifling atmosphere. The worshippers, dressed in every brilliant colour and every peasant fashion of the land, consisted for the most part of old wrinkled men and women, chaplet in hand, brown bonny girls and innumerable children. All were chanting a monotonous wailing hymn with one piercing cry for its refrain, "*Evviva Maria e Chi la cred!*"

In the middle of the nave a long stream of peasants from the southern provinces were fulfilling their terrible rite of penance. Prone on the pavement, women, many young and comely, were crawling upon their stomachs with their faces in the dust. Their mouths were open, and as they crawled they licked the stones beneath them; never for an instant, though their lips and tongues were torn by the grit, raising their foreheads to gain breath or a moment's respite from their agony.

A wave of anger and disgust rose in Bernardo's heart as he gazed at this frightful form of self-abasement. What pitiable terror of the future penalties had inspired a rite so abject and repellent? The people who performed it were not Umbrians, but natives of the ignorant provinces of the South; he could well guess from the confessions he had heard the savage crudeness of the sins they expiated.

He watched one group come forward from the sunlit piazza. There was a tall old peasant in blue knee-breeches, white stockings and worn velvet coat, with a red silk handkerchief knotted loosely at the neck; on his rugged handsome face a dogged look, like the expression in the eyes of a circus lion, in part a dumb revolt, part wonder, part sullen acquiescence in an

ordeal which he loathed. Beside him his wife, a stout woman with large silver earrings and kindly, well-cut features, carried a nearly naked infant. Between them came a beautiful girl, a scared wild creature who, glancing from one parent to the other, drew in a deep breath and suddenly flung herself upon the pavement, whereupon her mother knelt down behind her, and, calling to the man, gave him the child to hold. The girl lay motionless for a few moments till pressing her feet against her mother's knees she began to thrust herself slowly forward. The mother, clasping her rosary, weeping and praying silently, moved on her knees after her daughter; the man went to her head and tapping with his stick upon the flags before her, guided her down the nave. From time to time, when she paused from exhaustion, the mother arose and, lifting the long black coils of hair that fell over her face, wiped the perspiration from her neck and cheeks.

She was only one of a hundred who were performing the same rite, and it was easy for Bernardo to read the story of the sin which so weighed upon this humble family that it had brought them probably for long weeks journeying on the dusty roads to this place of expiation. No marriage ring was on the girl's sunburnt hand as she spread it out to oar herself along upon the pavement, yet hers must be the child. As Bernardo gazed at the careworn faces of the old couple bowed with grief, his disgust was drowned in pity and understanding. The passionate longing for purification could only find its outlet, according to the character of the race, in some intense dramatic act of penance.

Around them kneeling multitudes uplifting careworn, hard or tear-stained faces, prayed and shouted, until the great church rang with the pilgrim's hymn, chaunted by thousands of strong men and women, swelled by the shrill pipe of children, and the quavering murmur of the old, piercing, insistent, pitiful, yet terrible in its triumphant utterance, "*Evviva Maria e Chi la credò!*"

Bernardo moved yet further up the church until he stood close to the little chapel that was the goal of pilgrimage, the point on which a thousand eyes were fixed, to which a thousand souls were stretched in a passion of penitence and mystic yearning. When the crawling human creatures reached the iron gates, some of them almost swooned as they struggled to their knees with dazed eyes, bleeding faces and beseeching hands. They stormed the very Heavens with entreaty, while verily like a surging sea of human souls beating around a tiny ship of safety, they clung each in turn to the gates until others, pressing from behind, thrust them aside and took their places. When at length the group that Bernardo had watched arrived before the shrine, the girl could scarcely lift her forehead from the pavement. The mother raised her in her arms and feebly wiped the sweat and blood from her cut lips and nose, gasping for breath and steadying herself with one hand on the iron gate.

The girl scarcely heeded her, but knelt staring at the altar and its blaze of tapers with the look of one who saw a vision, terrible in its beauty. The mother drew from her daughter's pocket a glittering necklace of sequins wrapped in a blue-and-white checked handker-

chief. The girl took it at her bidding, and, thrusting one hand through the bars with an uncertain jerk of the wrist, threw it forward on to the altar steps. The father, pressing forward too, cast a small purse beside it, and tenderly lifting his daughter from her knees, led her with his wife through the crowd of onlookers into a side chapel, where they sat down to rest.

The mother held her daughter's hand and patted it, kissing from time to time the poor scratched face, while her father, still carrying the infant, looked on with a quiet smile on his old features. Gradually there stole into the girl's eyes also the light of happy peace, as she held out her arms for the baby, opened her bodice and put it to her breast. At length, her head pillowed on her mother's lap, she sighed and fell asleep.

"After all," Bernardo thought, "is their conception of God so hard and cruel? At least He is far more merciful than the world! Yet why, oh, why did I come here to see?"

With an infinite load of oppression upon his heart he left the church and climbed the rough path to the convent in the burning August sun. The earth was cracked with the heat, the dust of the roads had blanched the hedges, the feathered maize stood high under the drooping vines that were stained a bluish white with copper sulphate. He felt utterly desolate, utterly lonely, as he thought of the scenes of pity, terror and ecstasy, which he had just left. He knew that such fanaticism was exceptional and extreme, but his mood of depression emphasised the darker shades. As he passed between the fields he could still hear the

tumultuous hymns behind him in the church, where the frenzied crowd sang on and prayed until throats were parched, limbs cramped, hearts fainting and brains swimming. For the consciousness of sin and the longing for purification are the very portals of the Kingdom, and this hunger for pardon and the peace that follows absolution are perhaps the truest and most wonderful experience that it is given unto ignorant humanity to know.

II

"Evviva Maria e Chi la credò!" It rang still in Bernardo's ears as he sat that night in his cell and gazed at the hundreds of bonfires like a fiery constellation lighting up the plain. It rang above the sounds of the night and the distant singing of the pilgrim companies encamped within and around the city. He still saw the throng of souls pressing towards the Ship of their Salvation and realised with a new intensity all that the vision signified.

He felt, quite apart from his disgust at the animal grossness of their sins and the crude excesses of their method of purgation, quite apart from the ultimate problems and their theological solutions, the vital necessity of faith to ignorant human beings, such as he had watched that day. If the Ship should founder, what would become of all the strugglers in the sea? This was the problem that was far the most human, far the most urgent of all modern problems.

He believed that the small but vigorous attacking party consisted mainly of those classes of men who

from their external circumstances did not realise the significance of that which they destroyed, who were unconscious of the value of religious faith because perhaps least of all men they felt the thirst for it. They were men of the middle classes and of the overcrowded professions, schoolmasters, doctors, lawyers, students, tradesmen, managers and officials, men of a certain small amount of education and leisure; not the "down-trodden," the servile, the bestial, the ignorant, on whose behalf they claimed to fight. They were not those who needed most religion's curb or consolation, having sufficient ease to be "idealists" and sufficient prospects to refrain from vice or crime out of worldly policy or self-respect. Popular science had increased their knowledge of the external world at the cost of their ignorance of the internal; enthusiasm for its shallow generalisations blinded them to the insufficiency of Reason for Life's battle; while political bias involved in indiscriminate hostility the faith and the obsolete social system, wherein it was formerly enshrined. Visionaries, rationalists, vandals of the spirit, they destroyed old images whose significance and human value they could not recognise. Like woodworms in a panel on which an ancient masterpiece is painted, they gnawed their passage in and out and perforated the Sacred Face, oblivious alike of its loveliness and sanctity.

On the other hand, Bernardo recognised the countless opportunities that the Church rejected owing to the unbending attitude of a small clerical party, which fought not so much to save men's souls as its own privilege, not so much to oppose the strong advance of

atheist foes as to suppress the well-meant ardour of liberal supporters. Devoid of sympathy either for the social amelioration of the masses or the legitimate aspirations of democracy, this party pursued its narrow policy as though unable to see in the revolution more than a revolt of organised blasphemers. From cowardice or selfishness the Church had allowed her enemies with their rhetorical ideals of liberty, justice, hygiene, education and equality, to seize the citadel of light, while she remained enclosed within her convents and churches, jealous of dignity, suspicious of allies, and ever on the defensive, as though her Master had not bidden her "Go forth!"

But the arid rational ideals of the new men could not illumine the real world of man's soul. The poor, the ignorant, the bestial, the suffering, those who had no curb nor hope apart from Christianity, were losing their way in an unfathomable night of anarchy and despair. But whither look for succour? Could "Modernism" aid? Bernardo did not believe it; such "Modernism" as he knew seemed to him the mere diversion of a cultured class. Would intellectual reasons save, if living reasons failed? Yet was the Kingdom to be lost with all the poetry of the ages, the bright example of the saints, the deep symbolic meaning of the ritual, the inspiration of the sacraments, the eternal solace of the promise? Was the great Latin democracy of the future to be atheistic? The soul of the people was at stake and the spiritual treasure of two thousand years.

Bernardo thought that in the power of the Church to save her Kingdom, to make her vision the most vital

and creative force in the world to-day, lay the witness to her eternal Catholic Truth. For Truth is Truth just in so far as it lives and procreates itself within men's lives. Christ said not only: "I am the Truth," but also, "I am the Way! I am the Life!" Christ was the living principle that alone could save man's soul from death, here and hereafter; Christ the eternal Source of spiritual vitality.

Or was Christ dead in the world to-day, as He seemed to Bernardo to be dead in his own heart?

III

For the last two months he had been passing through a nervous crisis induced by severe emotional and intellectual strain. Doubt of his vocation, impatience with his opportunities, irritation at the apparent apathy of those around him, and pessimistic views of the future of religion in the world were problems that in his mind had been exaggerated to torment by outward suppression and internal iteration.

Hitherto the darkness had been broken by flashes when he had acted in abrupt obedience to impulses of mystic power, whose source appeared to be external to his consciousness. His will had been intensely with God always, though his reason questioned and his heart despaired. But now, after the festival of the "Pardon," the agony grew more intense and wholly unrelieved, sapping all spiritual vitality. At length he could think no more on the questions that beset him, for rational conclusions seemed to have no intrinsic meaning, but to be mere logical conventions, like coun-

ters in a children's game that represent no value in another currency. He found no comfort in scenes of natural beauty, which had lost their power to soothe and charm. Emotion was as numb as sense or reason; he merely felt a vacant loneliness, an expressionless despair.

His duties had become no more than a restless distraction to trifles of the moment from the contemplation of the abyss below him and around. He heard confessions and gave counsel, said his Mass and the Office with the rest of the community, wrote out his sermons, learnt and preached them, all mechanically, with the sense that he stood outside himself, that he merely watched these performances critically, without willing them or feeling the emotions which they simulated. He thought that all these things were vain, that his words were meaningless; that he was merely a phantom and a voice.

The hopelessness of his position was growing every day more clear to him, yet he knew he had not moral strength to leave the convent, even if he would. There hung over him a cloud of apathy with the thought that as it was now it would be to the end of life. At times the long hours in the choir became intolerable, the Office being no more to him than a lifeless form of words. "Meditation" only intensified his misery by throwing him back upon himself. During these long silences, broken only by the heavy breathing of the older friars, the occasional shuffling of feet and the slight distracting movements of some score of men and boys huddled together in a narrow space and endeavouring to think one thought, Bernardo had im-

pulses to cry out, to blaspheme, to cast himself down in the midst of his companions, whose atmosphere of holiness, complacency or drowsiness — he knew not which — was stifling him. Girolamo alone, as his confessor, knew something of his conflict; in his external life he hid his misery from pride and habitual reserve; he even believed that his companions shrank away from him and despised him as he despised himself.

But it was in the long sleepless nights that he suffered most acutely. At one moment he believed that his soul in its vileness had been cast out from God; at another he doubted what he had never before questioned, God's love and even His existence. The sense of His Presence had been all his life so intimate, that the sense of His absence now became a positive torment. Where there had been a passion of faith, there was a passion of disillusion.

Hour after hour he would toss in sleepless misery, rise and sit at the little table in the stifling August night, staring out at the slow stars and listening to the croaking of the frogs that seemed like a chorus of fiendish mockery. He could not pray; he could no longer control his thoughts; he drifted upon a sea of despair like a moral derelict. He felt the same blank inhibition of the will that he had known years before at Milan in the period of exhaustion after his father's death. He was beset, as he had been in Rome, by gross temptations, ideas of infamy, such as in the inherent purity of his nature he abhorred. Vain were the years of study and of faithful service, vain all the previous victories he had gained. He loathed the heat

of his clothing and his mattress; night after night he cast himself down upon the stones.

In the grey dawnlight he felt that the walls of his cell pressed in and stifled him, like the vault of a tomb in which a living man awakes to know he can escape no more. For even though he should flee the convent, leave the Order, change his name and bury his life in the noisy industrial world, he could not escape from the cell of thought which pressed in upon his soul far closer, far more ineluctable than any physical restraint. With every motion of his mind was bound the memory of God, of Christ, his longings and his prayers — pursuing shadows of a faith, now void and dead for him.

During the agony of these hours, so inexplicable yet so relentless, he believed that his former hours of light had been insane delusions. In physical pain he sought a respite from mental torture; using his cord as a scourge, he lacerated his back till the blood flowed.

CHAPTER VII

THE DARK NIGHT

I

AMONG the torments of suspicion which beset Bernardo during these months of spiritual night, lurked one persistent secret fear, inexplicable, unjustified and almost unacknowledged. Since his visit to Assisi, Orlando's letters had become less frequent; in the middle of June they ceased. Vittoria's letters, also, had grown rarer and more formal; she baffled his enquiries about Orlando with brief mention that he was singing in Paris, or taking a holiday in Switzerland. Bernardo felt beneath her lines that something was withheld. Were his old friends slipping from him; did they weary of his letters; was the gulf between them growing wider; had Orlando's visit in some way consummated this estrangement? Or was there something else behind — some secret trouble that they would not share with him? He was tormented by a sense of grievance, mingled with presage of disaster and unaccountable fears on their behalf.

In the second week of August came a letter from his aunt, Vittoria's mother. Orlando's absence was creating gossip, she complained. He was staying at St. Moritz in the same hotel as Clelia Simonetti, with whom he had been singing all the spring. The writer

was sure that that woman was his mistress; he would not be her first lover nor her last; she was notorious for breaking other women's homes, she added viciously. Vittoria was a purblind fool to let Orlando be so much away. The writer herself had never allowed her husband to pass a single night apart from her. Vittoria had been moping ever since she found she was mistaken in thinking she was going to have a child. The greater the madness of sending Orlando alone to Paris to sing in company with that other woman! She complained that now her daughter baffled her, refusing to speak openly about Orlando or to show his recent letters from St. Moritz. It was atrocious; Bernardo ought to use his influence with both, to get Orlando back immediately or to learn for certain whether he intended to desert his wife. Vittoria was growing thinner every day; if ever Orlando returned he would find her a perfect skeleton and without the excuse of having had a baby.

Bernardo read this letter with incredulous disgust; albeit they confirmed his fears he contemptuously rejected the suggestions it contained. None the less, he wrote a brief but urgent letter to Orlando, reproaching him for his silence and insisting on an answer. "What is this secret fear that I cannot expel from my mind?" he added impulsively, afterwards blaming himself for having given such expression to his doubts.

One morning a few days later, as he was sitting in his cell in a mood of restless impotence, Father Filippo brought Orlando's answer. It is not usual for one friar to visit another during the "Little Hours," but

Filippo's curiosity seized on this letter as an excuse. Bernardo's agitation as he recognised the writing and the trembling of his hands that tore the envelope, were not lost upon Filippo, who hoped to detect some clue to explain Bernardo's recent depression, too clearly visible of late for his companions to ignore. Linger-ing in the cell, Filippo saw him start and stagger as his eyes caught the first words on the sheet.

"What is it? Have you any bad news? Oh, dear, I hope it is nothing serious?" he cried.

Bernardo looked at him with a dazed expression. "Will you leave me alone, if you don't mind?" he said slowly in a hard voice.

Filippo felt a thrill of disappointment and resentment that for a moment drowned his sympathy. He left the cell without a word, but waited in the corridor.

Bernardo looked at the sheet again. The letter was dated from St. Moritz and without opening ran as follows:—

"I have left her and cannot return. It is in no way her fault. I am utterly unworthy of her and of your friendship. I have been vaguely conscious ever since I knew you that your atmosphere was unnatural for me, that you two drew me out of a lower orbit to which my baser nature gravitates. For ten years and more I have been sustaining a part beyond my powers, supported only by my love for her and for you. Now a stronger influence from my own sphere has pulled me back and I am helpless. But I cannot understand myself. I am conscious of acting treacherously and cruelly, and yet I cannot go back. De-

spise me, hate me, or forget me. I must be as one dead for you." There was no signature.

For a few minutes Bernardo sat quite still, dazed by the overwhelming ruin. For weeks he had battled with unjustified suspicion, yet now that certainty had come to him, the truth was inconceivable. Vittoria's life blighted, her faith shattered, her love scorned by his old friend, Orlando; Orlando, lost, disfigured, henceforth changed out of recognition to them both!

In a sort of dream he wondered how it could have happened. He saw Vittoria watching from the darkness of her box above the stage, while in the glare of the limelight, amid the colours and flowers, the intoxicating swell and thunder of the orchestra, Orlando poured forth his great voice in passionate harmony with the voice of the woman she divined to be her rival. He thought of the struggle in Orlando's nature, growing day by day more hopeless, the uprising of a real resistless flame under the iteration of the simulated, as the admiration for the artist who created as he created, who shared the labour and the triumph of his achievement, passed by means of a thousand subtle intimations, conveyed in the glances, touches, kisses of Elsa, Margaret, or Isolde, into passion for the woman, living, breathing through them all.

Then he pictured once more Vittoria, scorning to act on her suspicions and to play the gaoler of her husband, sending him away to sing in Paris and afterwards night by night sitting in her deserted home, watching each post for letters, tossing in sleepless doubts grown big as terrors in the darkness, or answering the enquiries of acquaintances with simulated con-

fidence, while secretly dreading lest they should be prompted by rumours which had not reached her ears.

Bernardo could not realise the havoc of the happiness of these two beings whom he loved best in the world; he could not think of them estranged, divided. He stared at the white walls round him, at the cypresses in the sunshine seen through the window, till suddenly he was conscious of a black veil falling between him and the light. His brain swam; he struggled to his feet, poured out a glass of water and drank it.

When Filippo, who was nervously listening in the corridor, heard the clink of the glass, he looked in and saw Bernardo lying face downward on the bed and sobbing like a child.

II

During the weeks that followed the news of Orlando's desertion of Vittoria, Bernardo lived as in an evil dream. He did not think about himself or the passing of the days. Desolation had numbed his very soul.

He thought with a dull ache at heart of his old friendship. He vaguely recalled the wistful envy with which he had first marked Orlando's charm and popularity among his fellow-students in the ink-stained class-room; the hot resentment when he joined the gang of his deriders; the flush of exultation when his new-won friend linked arms with him in the presence of their comrades. He had felt for him that boyish worship when love feeds on personal pride. He had watched all his triumphs as though they reflected glory

in himself; nothing could kill that pride, not even this vile act of treachery; he loved Orlando still.

Strangest of all, he thought even more about him, suffering more acutely, than about Vittoria. On her behalf he felt a bitter anger and revolt; yet not anger against Orlando, but against fate, or God. He could only think of his friend as he was once, albeit now changed by some inexplicable disaster.

He had so long believed that there was no one else in the world so worthy of Vittoria; no one else to whom he could surrender her; he could not think of this faithless betrayal as Orlando's act. He could not write to him; what would it avail to reproach, to exhort, to implore? He could only plead for him in writing to Vittoria.

She answered immediately: "There is no question of forgiveness. I love him always, utterly. I do not even hate the woman who has taken him away from me. I never met her, though I have seen her act with him. She is a magnificent singer, with beauty, fire and personality, and the only voice I know to match with his. The thing must have grown up between them through their singing so often and so passionately together. She has a husband and three little children, whom she has abandoned. God knows I do not hate her. She is nothing, a mere waif on the wind, as I am. I hate Life, Fate, the whole heartless machinery of laws and forces, yes — I must write it — I hate God."

Bernardo could not write to her; where could he find in his own life the recuperative power of faith to offer? He knew that the true source of help lies not

in written phrases, but in the spiritual strength they voice, and that his silence and his words alike would but reveal the drought of his own soul.

Yet his spiritual state was other than that which had preceded this great blow. Before it he had suffered from a sense of individual alienation from God's love, now he seemed to form a centre for the whole world's suffering. He suffered in dumb rebellion as he watched the wounded ant inadvertently crushed by his sandal on the garden path, the writhing worm that came out of the soil in the rain and perished in the grit of the road; he suffered dully and dumbly as these. Something of self seemed to have given way.

He resigned the struggle with besieging thoughts of darkness and despair, and gained the victory by surrender. If it were God's will that he should be thus tormented, harried by devils, torn by doubts and forsaken by the Holy Spirit, he would contend no more, since he could avail nothing; let God only take the life of his body as He had taken that of his soul! With his capitulation the forces of the enemy were withdrawn. He lay still, battered and bruised, but was no longer stricken; he gave himself over to his invisible tormentors and they abandoned him.

He no longer visited his friends and penitents; he ceased endeavouring to write or study; he hardly spoke or raised his eyes; he scarcely noted time, the seasons or the world. He said his Office and his Mass mechanically; he sat for hours in his cell, motionless, thoughtless, with his head between his hands; when he lay down upon his bed at night, he slept.

Thus two months passed.

III

One episode alone disturbed the bitter monotony of these dark weeks, adding, if possible, a deeper shade. Walking one evening through the city on some necessary errand, Bernardo encountered a long funeral procession, headed by the city band and followed by a large concourse of mourners, some carrying gigantic wreaths and others banners of various organisations, although among them were no Christian symbols and no tapers. The friar asked a bystander whom they were burying.

"Old Signor Antonio Manzoni," was the answer. "It is a civil funeral, as you see."

Bernardo had heard no rumour of his aged friend's last illness; he had died suddenly without absolution and his family were laying his body in the earth without Christian rites. The friar waited under an archway until the whole cortège had gone by; then followed at a distance and having passed the city gate, climbed up the steep hill below the Castle to a spot whence he could look down to the little cemetery, situate upon an isolated spur.

Few, if any, of the crowd had not mourned for parents, brothers, friends or children in that small enclosure, so familiar to their grief, adorned with a thousand testimonials to their fathers' ancient hope of immortality, but dedicate to-day for the first time to hopeless, endless death.

The long procession halted in a gravelled space before the closed doors of the mortuary chapel; the mourners grouped themselves in a wide circle sur-

rounding the black and silver hearse, while the mayor and various other black-coated men stepped forward in succession and read short farewell speeches, which formed the only ceremony.

The dead man's eldest son, the eloquent advocate, who had harangued Bernardo on his last visit to his father, spoke at greater length, and the resonant phrases were wafted up the hillside through the sultry evening air. He spoke with feeling of his father's patriotic services and private gentleness, citing his life as a conspicuous example of the sufficiency to man of what he termed "disinterested ideals, uncorrupted by false lures and threats pertaining to obsolete superstitious credence in a hereafter." The sonorous periods were not devoid of a certain stoical nobility, reminiscent of that heroic classical tradition which is so persistent in the cultured Latin mind; but the bareheaded crowd of rough, good-natured workingmen, holding their hats before them stolidly or nervously, understood little of it, the friar suspected, except that the speeches were directed against the priests.

Bernardo in his heart recited the office for the dead, and descending towards the city gate, watched the crowd in scattered groups re-enter. The band now played a selection of popular arias from an opera; youths were discussing, betting, joking, their efforts at crude gaiety manifestly laboured. Older men who had buried loved ones in the cherished hope of a reunion, walked with bowed heads or conversed of trivialities, their faces bleak with pain. The few women who had attended seemed to be scared, as though feeling they had taken part in some rite of sacrilegious wickedness;

the roughness of one especially in rebuking a light-hearted child, betrayed the bitterness of her mood. The thoughtless looked depressed, the vicious hardened; where was that tender resignation which the Christian funeral rite inspires?

Where was the calm courage, the resolution to confront the Inevitable in life and death with fortitude unshaken, of which the eloquent speaker had discoursed? In all the ages of the world Bernardo wondered had it ever existed except for a handful of philosophers? The apostles of the cold "disinterested Idealism" had discounted one not negligible element — that is to say, the human heart.

IV

September came and with it the vintage, the crowning rapture of the year that precedes its death and withering. When it was over all the world looked worn and listless. The trees were dry and dusty as their heavily-hanging leaves turned slowly brown. On the hills that were burnt to a pale dead gold, the dark rocks stood out sharply like protruding bones. At morning and evening the low mists marked the devious courses of the distant rivers; the sky was paler than in spring, and the sunlight harder. The face of the land had an almost haggard look; it reminded Bernardo somehow of the face of the Blessed Mother returning from the Cross.

He said something of this kind to Patrizio one evening, as they stood together in the twilight by the low wall of the little terrace just outside the convent gate. Patrizio was a gentle, tender-hearted man, the young-

est of the fathers of the community, having been ordained at the beginning of the year. All that Bernardo knew of his story was that he had left the world against the wishes of his family. The inner call had been so clear that he had broken all his earthly ties with a quiet firmness that was almost cruel. But of late a cloud of sorrow seemed to overhang his life as it overhung Bernardo's, and their suffering had drawn the two men silently together. Patrizio seldom spoke; none of the others knew the reason of his grief. He was the chapel organist and would play for hours in the evening between the offices. He was not a great musician, but his music brought relief.

When Bernardo spoke to him, he turned suddenly and hid his eyes under his hand.

"Ah!" he said, "she, the Blessed Mother, watched but three hours while He hung upon the Cross, and waited but three days before His resurrection. My mother, you know? She has lain in extremity of torture for three years nearly now, and He will not let her die! I wished to go to her, but she refused to let me come. She lies in a great hospital at Naples and she will not have her children see her because she is so changed. She used to be calm and beautiful, and she wants us to remember her as she was then. They say she cannot restrain her cries, which she would not have us hear. But I hear them all the time in my heart, and I feel every pang that pierces her dear flesh. When I am playing I think it soothes her, and I do not hear her moans so plainly. If I had remained in the world I would never have left her, never have let her steal away to die alone. But oh, the end does

not come, and I cannot resign myself to all her agony! ”

Bernardo could find no answer; he could only press Patrizio's hands and offer him such comfort as the mere physical touch of one human being gives another. Dumbly he felt that the deeper the soul plumbs into the bitter mystery of life, the more impossible it grows for her to remain indifferent to a personal Creator.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GATES OF THE SOUL

I

ON a golden afternoon in late October Vittoria came to Assisi. Bernardo had not seen her for more than seven years. In her black dress she looked taller than he had thought her; womanly dignity and suffering had ennobled the girlish figure he remembered. On her side, she vainly strove to recognise the boy who once had loved her in this pale ascetic friar with worn brown habit, stiff gesture and unapproachable reserve, that concealed a strange imperiousness of spiritual energy beneath a distant gentleness of manner. She looked steadily into his face endeavouring to read his heart and her hope of help from him. She marked how old and ill he looked, and even through her bitter sorrow her heart was stirred with pity. She lifted her heavy veil that he might see her better.

She was even more beautiful in the living reality than in his dreams. He had met no woman like her since he saw her last. He was almost at a loss to know how to speak to her, for, in a different way, she made him feel even more of an exile from the world of his youth than Orlando had done.

Under her thick black hair her face was almost colourless, except for the brown stains in the hollows

round her eyes. The firm clear chiselling of her lips and chin, of her straight, short nose, with its curved white nostrils, of the deep arched brows and delicate ears, reminded him more than ever of an exquisite ivory carved by an old Greek master's hand. Her eyebrows were drawn straight and dark beneath her broad, low forehead, the lashes falling long and fine from heavy, sensitive lids. The eyes were full and liquid as in the days when he could scarcely dare to look at them, having the same wondering directness of gaze that he had known in them years ago. But they moved now with a dull glance of unutterable weariness; there was a proud composure on her features in repose such as one may see on a dead face.

She spoke slowly, and her voice was toneless and indifferent. At times her graciousness only revealed too well how far her heart was from her words. Bernardo felt that, although some spark of faith had brought her to him in Assisi, her pride forbade that she should ask either for his help or for his prayers. She could not yet pour out her grief as friend to friend, and to touch upon her sorrow would be only to provoke a storm that would make his task a hundred times more difficult. He recognised in her dark mood the counterpart of his; but the instinct of spiritual directorship was so strong in him that he felt that at all costs he must hide this from her knowledge. He must restore the light of God to her, even if now he could not rekindle it in his own heart.

As they walked side by side up the little street, she wondered wildly why she had come to him, and he why God had sent her. He asked her about her jour-

ney, her mother's health and her brothers' lives, after which for a while it seemed as though their talk must cease, and she must go away.

"How can I ever speak to him of myself?" she thought, and he, "How long can I prevent her doing so?"

He told her all about his life, the trouble in the convent and Carocci; he talked of the rising tide of anti-clerical feeling, of the poverty of the city and of his little school. He claimed her encouragement and sympathy, and without looking at her, imagined her to be the girl of their old friendship and he the boy who shared his aspirations with her. At first she was disappointed at his remoteness until she recognised how difficult was this monologue to him, and that his heart was as far away as hers from this talk of comparatively indifferent things. Then she began to understand and helped him to keep up the flow of common-places.

There was something rich and unaccountable about Vittoria. Like Orlando she had read much, had seen much and travelled; but, whereas in Orlando's talk the light fell full and broad and displayed the riches of his knowledge, in Vittoria's it only glinted and suggested. Her mind was as large and mobile, but more serious. It was useless to speak drily and dogmatically, for every thought of hers was real and living. Moreover with her innate courtesy she turned her whole attention to the smallest trifle that Bernardo said. As of old she understood before he explained, and accepted or denied before he demonstrated or refuted. Like Orlando she drew his mind back to the


big world's way of seeing things; she viewed them as directly but more spiritually than he. In spite of the bitter misery in her heart, he divined that she was unconsciously responding to the influence of the place.

On the next day it became easier for them to talk and to take refuge from their embarrassment in their mutual love of art. Under Bernardo's guidance within the great basilica, Vittoria found, as he had found seven years before, a subtle solace in the beauty of the old Franciscan legends, and the revival of art they had inspired. He told her the histories and explained the allegories with the thoughts and dreams which they suggested to him.

Together they passed solemn moments kneeling in the faint ruby glow of perpetual lights and damp chill of the little subterranean chapel that is hewn out of the living rock around the body of the Saint; together they gazed at the glowing tapestry of paintings, where in the rich twilight of jewelled windows pale virgins and saints look gravely from the walls with almond eyes; together they traced the imagery of the great allegories upon the central vaults. In the Chapel of St. Martin they lingered over the tender fancies of the Siennese, whose brush was dipped in dreams and whose colours are the colours of the air; or admired in the Chapel of the Magdalene the exquisite idyll of her meeting with her risen Lord in the pale dawn of the Resurrection morning and the grand gesture of the Master calling Lazarus from his tomb. Together they studied the marble dadoes with their dainty patterns in mosaic, the haloed kings and queens upon the piers and arches, the relics in the Treasury and the precious

tribute that all Christendom had poured upon the sepulchre of the Spouse of Poverty. They wandered in the cool seclusion of the little cloister within its giant cypresses and double tier of ancient arches, reading the epitaphs of many famous in Life's fever who have come here to rest. They climbed the little stairs and felt the thrill of emerging into the cool bright spaces of the Upper Church, "the House of Praise," as Bernardo called it, in contrast to "the House of Prayer" which they had left. Weary at length with excess of beauty, they went out into the sunset and sat looking quietly over the great view until they parted for the night.

Bernardo knew instinctively, and Vittoria also, though less consciously, that all the while they were brought thus together in the sympathy for an impersonal loveliness, it was growing every moment easier for her to speak. The tale that was burning in her brain was becoming slowly purged of its extremity of bitterness by the influence of this wealth of spiritual loveliness. Moreover Bernardo was gradually regaining his dominion over her mind. Whenever he saw the cloud growing heavy in her eyes, he drew her attention away and saved her from some outburst, for which she was secretly grateful. By putting off the crisis, that must come, until his own time, he was making her give up her will and strengthening her faith in him. He was determined not to let her speak before he knew that he could control what she should say. As long as he read in her eyes that bitter question of God's love, as long as he felt that her mood halted between the alternatives of that terrible dilemma



of rebellion: "It is that He knows not and could not help, or that He knows but does not care!" so long he would not let her make that doubt more definite by utterance. Cried only in the chambers of her loneliness, its record could be deleted far more easily than if it were allowed to startle their companionship with its cry of blasphemy and burn its offence into both their minds through the memory of an actual scene. In this he was protecting his own faith as well as hers, which slowly she began to realise with a growing comprehension of his own struggle with his past.

There was one moment when the tacit pact was almost broken. In the Piazza of St. Francis a little beggar child ran up to her with flowers. She stooped and took a bunch, filling its tiny hand with copper coins. Bernardo said with a weak smile, "If you spoil them like that, how do you think I shall ever lure them to my school?"

She looked up.

"How do you think I can resist the appeal of such a child?" Then impetuously she stooped again and kissed it. "Ah! How I long for a little girl like you!"

"Why not?" he said. She saw his thought, she might adopt a child. She glanced up at him with a flash of anger; by two short words he had undone the labour of a day.

II

Thus for some days Bernardo walked with his cousin for several hours in the afternoon and — with exception of his momentary error — baffled all allu-

sion to her sorrow, moulding her thoughts and moods to his own will. At length one evening after they had spent a short while in the Upper Church, they passed out of the city by the Gate of San Giacomo and wandered between the cypress and acacia trees, along the beautiful road that, skirting the hillside, leads to the secluded cemetery. On one hand far below them lay a little smiling valley, on the other arose the rich green banks bright with cyclamen and purple autumn crocus. They hardly spoke to each other as they walked the whole length of the avenue; they both felt that the crisis must come now and yet each hesitated. They stopped once for a few minutes on the way and listened to the flute-like warble of the *passera solitaria*, which is the singing bird of autumn in Assisi. They reached the lonely enclosure that clings to a spur of rock overhanging the winding Tescio gorge, and looked through the gate at the great tombs ranged around the walls, the clipped box hedges with their trailing roses and the clumps of withered lavender among the humbler graves.

Then, rounding the hill, they turned to the right and Vittoria started at the sudden change. A rough path led them onwards over steep slopes of splintered stone that streamed from the grim quarries overhead beneath the ruined fortress walls down to the gaunt ravine, cut by the torrent through the barren mountains. The distant slopes with their majestic lines were streaked and scarped with crumbling rock, rose-coloured, grey or purple, naked save for the low brushwood of little oak trees, whose foliage was already withered to a golden brown. The rugged beauty of

the scene was almost sinister in startling contrast to the gentle loveliness of the rich Umbrian plain behind. Two frowning castles, linked by a line of ruinous wall, were almost all that was visible of the little city, so grim and warlike in its aspect from this side.

Vittoria said: "Assisi is a city of surprises! The great convent is half a religious house and half a forbidding fortress. The basilica is in part a shrine of loveliness and in part a cavernous tomb. The land on that side seems to have an especial benediction, here to be utterly desolate and accursed."

"Is it not like this with all holy things?" answered Bernardo. "The nearer one approaches the Divine, the stronger grow life's contrasts. It is just this that confounds those minds who would assign the limits of their own small vision to the vastness of the personality of God. There are nowhere else in human experience the heights and depths, the blinding light and the unplumbed darkness that the soul finds when it draws near to Him. So infinitely kind and yet so utterly stark and ruthless is the action of His love. No wonder the weak soul cries out at His apparent contradictions, for the love of God is a consuming fire, a thousand times more passionate, more jealous, more exacting, aye, and often it seems, more cruel, than any passion that is known to this poor fretful heart! The touch of His fondest caress may burn like vitriol, and perhaps the only limit of His tender mercies is in the strength of our endurance. And yet to those who know Him best, there is no bliss like the smarting of such wounds!"

"Oh, it is all so strange, so utterly inexplicable,"

cried Vittoria, clasping her hands convulsively. "I seemed to have all my heart desired and then suddenly everything, everything I loved was swept away!"

"Everything you loved?" answered Bernardo gently. "Don't you think that just there may lie the secret? We suffer in order that we may learn to love God only, for in His love alone is our eternal life. How hardly shall a rich man enter the Kingdom! It is just earthly happiness that makes His love most difficult. There is no road to Him but by abject and complete surrender. The more He smites us the more we must learn to love and understand."

"And yet, blow after blow!" cried Vittoria. "It was almost in the same hour when I knew that I should not have the child I longed for, that I saw in Orlando's eyes that I had lost him too. It was in my bitter sorrow of disappointment, which he could not understand, that I let him slip away, for already with the denial of my prayer for motherhood, I seemed to lose half of myself. If I had had a child I should have kept him, but after this came defeat upon defeat. At times I felt too proud to fight for him, at others I struggled blindly, only to be humiliated. He suffered bitterly, I think, and I could only pity him, seeing how that of which he could not speak to me was pulling him irresistibly away. On the last night I told him I knew everything. He broke down, vowed that he would not go to Paris, wanted to throw up all his engagements; begged me to come away with him where he should see nothing to remind him of his old life. I refused. Poor boy! he could not help it, but I could see that he was relieved. The next morning he was

gone — without a word. I packed up everything he needed with my own hands, all the while feeling I was building my own grave. I sent him on his luggage and we exchanged simple letters of business, news and plans. I could not weep myself; I could not reproach him for having wrecked my life; I only felt an overwhelming pity and rebellion. At length, one night — I suppose I was really more ill than I knew — in a fit of desperation I ended this make-believe. I wrote him a letter which belied my heart, cutting him off and refusing to receive more letters that were merely a thin pretence to hide that all was over between us two. No one knows how I suffered after that! I had to give way at last to save my reason. But then there came inquiries — my friends, my mother, Angelo — the very servants seemed to think it their duty to commiserate and humiliate me. So I grew like a stone within — *‘ed dentro impietrai.’* The only moments when I seemed to live were frenzied flashes of rebellious rage in which I longed to kill myself in order to show my hatred of the cruelty of life. But these are growing rarer and I feel I am as one dead. While I am with you, my friend, I can for a while forget my grave; recalled to myself I feel that all things whatsoever are abhorrent or indifferent. For months I have neither wept nor prayed. My heart is empty.”

“Then, believe me, it has all the more room for God,” whispered Bernardo. “Those who are rich in life have the greater difficulty. You have only to let go your pride, to accept His will and to fill up the void with a wealth of love far richer than all which you

have lost. '*Fiat voluntas Tua sicut in coelis et in terra,*' that is the password to the Kingdom, whose essential work is unity of will. Yes, to give up one's will: that is the secret. And how great is the prize! The gift of God is God Himself, no less!"

They were standing side by side on the brink of the great precipice of broken rock, staring up the long ravine where the river gleams between the brown and purple mountains, but neither of them saw what was before them. Somewhere above them on the steep slopes a little goatherd cried that strange minor snatch of song, which is so familiar to all who haunt those hills, yet so elusive, and this cry with the low murmur of the torrent far below was the only sound that broke the silence for a few long minutes.

"I can hear the tides of the Spirit beating upon the closed gates of your soul. The whole company of Heaven is around you watching. Come! Open the gate! I will help you."

Turning suddenly, he faced her. She shrank back half afraid of him, piteously trembling yet clinging to her pride. Something within his heart had given way. He looked at her in wonder as though waking from a dream.

"No, no, it is useless!" she whispered. "My faith is dead. The light of God has utterly departed from me."

Then again to Bernardo there came one of those flashes of mystic power when he seemed to lose all consciousness of self and his surroundings, and to speak with an intensity of concentrated feeling, as though under the control of a mightier Will which

had absorbed his own. He confronted Vittoria sternly.

"We have done wrong," he said; "God has not forsaken us, but we have cast Him out! Repeat these words that I say after me:—I, Vittoria Francesca, Thy creature and Thy handmaid, do humbly thank Thee, Lord, for all Thy love towards me, and especially that Thou hast deemed me worthy to share Thy sufferings!" He stopped.

"I cannot, oh, I cannot!" gasped the woman breathlessly.

"Yes, yes! You can, you must!" and he began the words over again.

She sank down on the stones, sobs catching her breath.

"What is the use if I do not feel it?"

For all answer he repeated the words for the third time, and his voice in its vibrating power hardly seemed his own. Then her will gave way to his, utterly broken.

"I, Vittoria Francesca, Thy creature and Thy handmaid, do humbly thank Thee, Lord, for all Thy love towards me, and especially that Thou hast deemed me worthy to share Thy sufferings!"

"Even as Thou wast cast out, let me be rejected!" he went on and she repeated; "Thou wast forsaken by Thy loved ones, so be it with me!"

"I crave Thy pardon for my heart's rebellion," he concluded; "and I pray Thee, if it be for my soul's welfare in Thy sight, strike me again, Lord! Strike me again!"

She said it to the last words and then he left her,

weeping on the stones of the lonely little valley. He walked back to the cemetery, and stood just in her sight with his back turned towards her, praying with all his strength. It seemed to him that the whole world throbbed with heavenly light. The mystic vision had returned to him.

From her heart also in that hour a mighty load dissolved and slipped away. It was for her, as for him, as though the living stream had been sealed by frost and now gushed forth in new vitality. It carried away her doubts on its impetuous flow and quenched the dumb agony of thirst through all her soul. It was as though new sap was forcing its way through her withering illusions. If God was so near, she could never be utterly alone. She felt an almost physical sense of warmth within her breast. She gave herself up, let go, and drifted with the stream.

When at last, she rose, and moved slowly towards Bernardo she was still weeping quietly, but they were glad, good tears that she shed. Her heavy veil had fallen over her face, but the change was visible in the way she held herself and in every movement of her frame. She took his hand as the hand of a priest and kissed it. Then they walked back in silence towards the city, seeing God together.

III

When Bernardo reached the convent, Filippo told him that the Guardian had been asking for him. Bernardo went directly to the Guardian's cell.

Father Silvestro looked embarrassed and annoyed.



"Who is this woman with whom you have been spending so many hours of late?" he asked.

Bernardo replied that she was his cousin, that she had suffered a great sorrow and had come to him for sympathy and help. Where was her home? Could she not have found what she needed among her friends and from her usual director?

"She desired to come to me because of our old friendship, father," answered Bernardo.

"You know that there are no such friendships in religion. Was there ever any more intimate feeling between you, any earthly love?"

"Yes. Years ago I loved this woman and hoped to make her my wife. But she never loved me otherwise than as a sister and a friend. It was in my renouncement of her that God revealed to me my vocation."

"You should not have seen her without telling me this," said the Guardian gravely. "It seems that there has arisen some talk of these constant meetings and that is not for the good name of the convent. You have been imprudent, to give it the lightest word. I regret that I must bind you by obedience to refrain from visiting or walking with this woman again alone. But I give you permission to write to her and explain the matter fully. With this exception there must be no more intercourse between you."

Bernardo found depth below depth of meaning in every phrase of the familiar office. The Guardian glanced at him and marvelled. How could this prohibition be anything but bitter and humiliating? His face had been pale and sad all through the summer.

Whence came this hectic spot of colour on his cheeks? Tomaso peered shrewdly at him, wondering whether his ghostly brightness might not be a symptom of carnal love. Domenico had said that he believed Bernardo was about to leave the convent owing to doubts born of the study of modernist literature. Had he come to a decision, had this woman supplied another motive?

After supper when the others retired in silence to their cells, Bernardo entered the Chapel of the Crucifix and knelt down upon the pavement. Girolamo, who as sacristan went round to look to the fastening of the doors and to see that all was in order for the night, did not notice him where he knelt in the shadow. He moved round the nave, stumbled over a chair and set it noisily in its place by the wall before he returned to the choir, and went up to his cell. Bernardo did not hear his movements; he knelt in silence, in rapture and in vision far on into the night.

PART III

THE NEW LIFE

"Oh! that Thou wouldst enter into my heart to inebriate it."

—*St. Augustine.* Con. V. 5.



CHAPTER I

THE VISION IN THE DREAM

I

BERNARDO had entered the Chapel of the Crucifix to pray for Vittoria before the Blessed Sacrament. Together with the happiness of his newly quickened faith, he felt a yearning for God that was almost painful in its poignancy.

The building was entirely dark except for the small semi-circular window above the western door, which gives upon the courtyard under the cloister, and for the dim circle of radiance shed by the flickering ruby of the sanctuary lamp. The muffled sound of the friars moving in their cells overhead died gradually away, and Bernardo heard alone the rhythm of his own breathing and the singing of the blood in his ears.

At first his thoughts revolved about the central desire of his petition, the welfare of Vittoria, her future peace, her faith. He dimly realised that this prohibition of seeing her again should contain a hard blow for both alike, but somehow it did not trouble his great happiness. He felt a sweet inward acquiescence in the timeliness of the sentence now that the rebellion in her heart had given way. He could do no more for her; God would complete His work. He had no

resentment against those who had so misinterpreted his mission of succour as to make of it an offence and scandal. He did not justify himself; he thought that if any were offended the fault must be all his own. He tried to realise what had happened, what God had done to them both in the little valley. His effort to help Vittoria and his entire self-forgetfulness had diverted the current of his bitterness, but it was only in the moment when he spoke to Vittoria of God's love that he once more realised its power and grasped how true was his utterance for himself.

Now on the instant that he had completed his work in her they were to be separated; how right and just that was! Henceforth he could only send out great waves of prayer and sweep her irresistibly to God. He felt as he prayed that he was asking for that which was already granted. It was like the re-iteration of a child who has been frightened in a dream and now pours out its heart in happy tears against its mother's breast.

As he prayed, the orbit of his thought was slowly narrowed to a sense of joyous certainty of God's Presence, not merely without him in the Blessed Sacrament, but deep within his heart. His soul thrust downwards and inwards into the spring of its own being, till thought and outward consciousness faded and he could only articulate one recurrent phrase with scarcely moving lips: "*Deus meus! Deus meus!*"

His eyes closed of themselves, his soul let slip even this last hold upon the sensual world and glided downwards as a stone sinks slowly through a deep still pool until at length with wavering swerves it settles softly

and comes to rest. Yet his soul in itself was intensely conscious of an ineffable joy and peace, senseless, yet understanding all things. It was as though "drowned in an immense Love as in a sea, entirely under water, so that it could on no side touch, see or feel anything but water." He was conscious of a transcendent sense of spiritual illumination without the possibility of knowing or recording what he saw. The impression of that instant was one of blinding light, of power and perfect bliss. Then suddenly the tide of ecstasy receded and his mind became dimly conscious of shadows and the red glimmer over him, and a Voice said as though in his ear clearly and sharply: "*Nonne permundabo e paleis triticum, quod in horreum meum congregabo?*"

Roused with a start, he felt a tingling in his limbs; he moved and turned his head. He was cramped with kneeling on the hard stones. Who had spoken? he wondered. There was no one in the chapel. There was only fathomless silence and black darkness beyond the faint red glimmer. He prayed: "*Apprehende ventilabrum, Domine, Domine! Parce tamen tritico pro gloria tua!*" Again he prostrated himself upon the steps, his forehead resting on his clasped hands, his thoughts revolving around the meaning of the words he had just heard with such intense and authoritative clearness. "Shall I not thoroughly purge from the chaff the grain to be gathered into my garner?"

Of course, the chaff was his earthly conception of God, of what God ought to do. It was all his intellectual doubts and reasonings about his own vocation,

all the mental strife, the fits of rebellion, the introspections and distrust, all that had obscured his perfect faith in God's guidance. He understood the meaning of the words by a flash of intuition. "Take Thy fan into Thy hand, Lord. But spare the grain for Thy glory!" He felt a pang of deep unworthiness.

Again as he lay resting and quiescent, the physical sense of light died out as the wave of ecstasy and Uncreated Light absorbed him. He felt and knew, with an absolute certainty, transcendent Truth, Love, Power and Joy unutterable. Again the Voice rang out with extraordinary distinctness: "*Nihil es! nihil es! Nec bonus nec malus! Fac voluntatem meam!*"

It seemed so clear and loud that, as his memory returned, he thought for an instant the whole convent must be awakened. He listened for a few moments to the unbroken silence. Then gradually he recognised that the Voice had no sound in it, no tone, no accent that he could recall, only distinctness and authority.

"Lord! I am nothing! Have Thy will with me!"

He rose from the altar steps, and walked twice or thrice up and down the nave. His limbs were cold and stiff, but at the same time he felt extraordinarily light, infinitely happy and thankful. He would have liked to sing the *Te Deum*, but he laughed to think how inadequate his voice would be to express the joy that he felt. He believed that he had a great work before him, a battle which he longed to begin. If he had to suffer, what rapture that would be! He sat down to rest on a chair in the nave, but after a few minutes rose and flung himself again before the altar.

He felt he was again sinking back into unconsciousness, but it was not the ecstasy that he had known before; it was rather a deep sleep or a trance. In it he had a dream, a symbolic reconstruction of the suggestions that controlled his mind.

He thought he was standing in the centre of the nave with the other friars ranged on either side. The Blessed Host was exposed upon the altar amid a blaze of candles. Then a hideous Form rose up before him. It cried with what seemed a cruel glee: "Thou shalt strive with me, till I strip thee of the husk!"

Shadowy beings surged around him hiding the bright altar; invisible hands tore off his habit until for an instant he seemed to stand naked and in utter darkness. He was not afraid, but when the terrible Figure clutched him with its taloned grip and fastened its teeth in the flesh of his breast he felt so fierce an agony that he shrank back and struggled vainly to escape. He fought with his hands and tried to wrench the talons and the tearing teeth out of his flesh, though all the while a voice in his heart was whispering: "Let go! It is only the husk. I am the grain!"

At length in his dream he closed his eyes and surrendered to his terrible Adversary. The pain reached the climax of agony, overpassed it and declined into an exquisite relief and bliss. Let the other do his worst with him; he was nothing; he had no will. "I am nothing, I am nothing!" was his inward cry. Then in his dream his eyes opened. The church was filled with dazzling light. The Figure with whom he had wrestled vanished, and in its place there stood One.

in shining majesty before the monstrance on the altar. He saw the gleaming robe, the pierced feet, the hands, the wounded brow and the eyes of his Redeemer.

The walls of the church receded. Around him were not merely his companions in the convent, but infinite hosts of the Order, past, present and to be, and beyond them the saints and the whole company of Heaven. The vision only lasted for an instant. He was as a mote of dust upon the pavement at the foot of the shining Figure of his Master. Then He too vanished and the Voice rang in his ears again: "*Nihil es! Sicut virgula in manu mea, sicut manus mihi, sine mente ullo, sine voluntate!*"

After that he knew no more. Whether he swooned or slept he could not tell. The next moment that came to his consciousness was that in which he saw Girolamo and Filippo with a small oil lamp bending over him in the dawn and asking how he came to be there so early and whether he had slept in the church all night?

II

Bernardo struggled to his feet, reassured the two friars who were anxiously watching him, and saluting the Sacrament, passed out of the chapel to his cell.

The other two stared after him for a moment; then Girolamo clasped his hands ecstatically. "I always knew it! I always knew that he would see the Lord! Oh, how good God has been to us!" He fell on his knees to give thanks.

Filippo stood in hesitation for a few seconds; Girolamo was always so impulsive, he thought. He



lifted the candlesticks from the altar and took them into the sacristy to renew the tapers in them.

While thus engaged he was joined by Domenico. Filippo whispered mysteriously: "We found Bernardo lying on the altar steps just now. Girolamo believes that he has had a vision."

Domenico briefly cross-examined him and learnt that there was nothing to warrant such an assumption beyond the fact that Bernardo had been found asleep in the chapel and had refused to say how long he had been there. Already jealous and distrustful of Bernardo, he considered Girolamo was an impulsive fool to jump to this conclusion without evidence, being altogether disposed himself to take an opposite view of the case.

When the next father, Patrizio, appeared, neither Filippo nor Domenico said anything. They knew that he had a great admiration for Bernardo and they felt intuitively that he would make the same assumption as Girolamo. To Martino it was obviously useless to speak; he was so deaf that one might as well announce the news to the community in general. But when Tomaso entered Domenico drew him aside. "Bernardo was found asleep upon the altar steps," he whispered. "Apparently he had been there all night, but he refused to answer this when Girolamo asked him. Girolamo, of course, believes that he has seen visions and all that sort of thing."

"Girolamo is always scenting a saint," said Tomaso; "but one does not expect such a one to go about days together with a woman, and to say nothing about it."


"Poor dear Girolamo!" sighed Domenico.

It was he who told the Guardian of the episode. Father Silvestro listened gravely, merely nodding his head and pressing his lips together doubtfully. He perfectly understood Domenico's unconscious motive for the information. Moreover, he detested gossip. For him the cardinal virtues should be five, not four,—Fortitude, Justice, Prudence, Temperance and — Silence.

III

As Bernardo sat in his cell his joy brought tears to his eyes. He remained perfectly still for a short while, and gave himself up to it. The only other emotion that rose into his consciousness was wonder. He saw his old life and his thoughts with extraordinary clearness and yet with the sense that they were not his own; it was as if he were gazing into the mind of another. He simply could not understand how that other could have been so blind as to have suffered in the way that somehow he remembered that he had. He looked upon the man Bernardo and the boy Anselmo as strange dark shadows that now had disappeared. His present self was reflecting discursively from the centre of its own joy, looking round its habitation with new eyes. For the rest, he was emptied of his former self with its sheath of mental habits, desires and affections. It was the chaff that had been winnowed away.

He felt that the source of his joy was external to his consciousness. It was a stream flowing through it, yet it formed his whole being; he was merely a wave, a curve of water in the current. The passing of the stream was joy; its substance, love. He did not feel



only a love for God or for other things in God; this he had known throughout his former life. He felt that God was Love and that he was Love; therefore there was no love for God, there was unity. Also the essence of things visible and invisible was Love. But the stream was here and there obstructed by illusions, husks of vain desire and wilful self-limitation on the part of the creature towards God.

He had no desire for any one thing, having all; he felt an unutterable richness of life. As in the previous dead state he had known no desires from disgust of all things, so now he knew none from joy — joy which made all single pleasures poor and tasteless. Henceforth he had no will of his own; he had abdicated the throne of his soul; “he had given the keys of the house to Love.”

When the hour came for him to say his Mass, he went down to the chapel as a man in a happy trance. At the act of consecration the waves of joy grew so tumultuous that with difficulty he restrained himself from falling into ecstasy. In the choir the others watched him closely, but he did not notice them.

The office over, Father Silvestro asked him if it were true that he had passed the night in the chapel. Bernardo looked up to answer with so rapt a glance that the Guardian forebore to interrogate him further.

In the corridor above, Bernardo overtook Patrizio looking ever more haggard and thinking always of his mother's agony in the hospital at Naples. Upon a sudden impulse Bernardo put his hand on the young father's shoulder and said quietly: “Say *Deo gratias!* It is all over.”

Patrizio started; "What do you mean? How do you know? Ah! If it were only true!"

"Say *Deo Gratias!*" repeated Bernardo and passed on to his cell. Then it came into Patrizio's mind with a flash of conviction that Bernardo was right. The cloud of his agonising suspense broke suddenly; he wept like a child. The telegram did not reach him until several hours later.

During Recreation, Domenico approached Bernardo in a flurry of agitation. A celebrated preacher, a professor of theology at the Perugian seminary, who was to have preached in the Church of the Minerva at Benediction on the following evening, had met with a slight accident and could not travel. The friars in charge of the church had sent down in haste to Domenico, requesting him to preach instead or send a substitute. Domenico disliked preaching without careful preparation. He was wont to write out his sermon, put it aside for a few days, revise and polish it before learning it by heart. It humiliated him to appeal to Bernardo, but he thought it a good opportunity for testing his state of mind. Bernardo accepted without hesitation.

After matins Patrizio followed him along the corridor to his cell and when they were alone, lifted the edge of his habit as if to kiss it. Bernardo embraced him.

"You were right, you were right!" whispered Patrizio. "She died in the dawn; they have telegraphed. But what can I say of the way in which you knew it?"

"Nothing!" answered Bernardo. "Do not men-

tion it to anyone. It is best to be jealous of the secrets of the King."

IV

Bernardo wrote to Vittoria:—"Did either of us think while we walked for so many hours together these last days, that some brother might be offended at what he did not understand? I am forbidden to see you again, but my prayers and yours will be in union always at the Throne of Love. How good it is to think that He led us side by side to where we need each other's help no more! We need no more the creature's love, for we know ourselves to be at one with Love Himself. I will not say good-bye, God-speed! for I know that God is with you as with me; then what can separate our souls for ever?"

He sent the letter to the hotel by a peasant boy who brought back the answer in an hour. Vittoria wrote:—"If we offended any, it was God who blinded us to that danger until we had found what we both needed—though I did not know it was for both until the message came. Then I understood, well, many things. I came here to seek strength from you, and God through you has given me, not strength, but weakness, and therein a peace and joy of which I had not dreamed.

"Now I must tell you something that I could not say before; how it was that I came straight to you. Almost the first day that they let me go out after my illness I wandered listlessly down the Via Oriani, crossed the Via S. Giuseppe, (or the Via Giuseppe Verdi as they call it in these days that know not the

saints), till I stood in front of the church in the sunlight watching the people in the little piazza. The world, the familiar streets, housefronts, horses and carriages and the passing crowd all seemed utterly different from anything that I had seen before. I could not make them out, but on the whole I was rather amused in a vague bitter way with the change that had come over everything. All at once little old Dom Giuseppe Mariani tottered out of his church and approached me. You know, he must be nearly ninety now, very bent and very frail, but he is still able to say his Mass and to get about a little by himself. His eyesight is better than it was, they say, but he is quite deaf. He touched my arm and spoke sympathetically for a few minutes. Suddenly he said: "Go to Assisi, yes, that is where you must go!" Perhaps he saw surprise or misunderstanding in my face, for, you see, I couldn't talk to him — but he repeated it emphatically several times looking up at me with a strange earnestness in his clear grey eyes. His hair is quite white and long; at that moment his whole frame seemed to be quivering with the energy of his message; he made an extraordinary impression upon me. This happened just three weeks before I started. How long ago it seems!

"I pray much for him whom I have lost, and realise that half the fault was mine. I think that ever since you left Milan, all these seven years, we had been slipping away unconsciously. We were too rich. There are certain things one cannot accept from the world without paying by the spirit. Our life was too full of earthly happiness."

V

Girolamo was in the refectory vainly endeavouring to drive out the cats that had invaded it while the lay brothers were washing dishes in the scullery. There was a black cat, a sandy cat, with two tabbies from a neighbouring farm. As fast as Girolamo expelled one intruder, another dashed in by the opened door. He clapped his hands and scolded them, chasing them round the table legs. The sandy cat was the most impudent; sometimes she would spring from table to table and dart into dark corners out of reach, glowering maliciously as though she were watching a bird. At other times she would deliberately sit down a few yards from the door, licking her paws as if daring Girolamo to push her out. Or while he was expostulating with the other cats she would creep under his habit and rub herself ingratiatingly against his legs, impeding his movements and tripping him up, knowing well that he would not hurt her for the world.


Domenico, passing by the open door, remarked that if Girolamo would only slap each cat soundly when he caught it, he would be saved much trouble in the future.

Girolamo was hurt, but answered gently: "It would be all right if only the Brothers wouldn't throw chicken bones upon the floor."

Domenico said that that was a disgusting habit, in practising which he was afraid Tomaso was the worst offender; then he chased one tabby out into the court.

Bernardo looking in a moment later, laughed, fetched a plate, and going down upon his hands and

knees, gathered up the bones and scraps that were strewn upon the stone floor under the benches. Girolamo followed his example, watched greedily by the enemy from various points of vantage. Suddenly, when the plate was piled, the sandy cat dashed in between them, scattering the bones once more and carrying off the largest. Bernardo, sitting on the floor, laughed joyously and light-heartedly, as he had not laughed for years. Girolamo on his knees beside him was laughing gaily too, when suddenly he stopped, glanced at Bernardo, then flung his arms around his neck and folded him impulsively to his breast.



CHAPTER II

THE HEALING OF LINDA

I

THAT evening as Bernardo climbed the road to the city gate, the fields, the hills and the sky were filled with a new light and glory. Every twinkling olive-leaf seemed to vibrate with joy, every cloud to form or melt upon the face of Heaven by the rapture of being or dissolving for God's praise; every tiniest blade of grass to tremble in reaction to an impulse from Love's Heart.

He longed to share with all the world the secret of his joy and perfect vision. He entered the city and went straight to the house of little Linda Amori, whom he had not visited for many weeks. There were now few foreigners to beg from in Assisi and the weather was too damp and cold for the child to lie out in front of the church. Bernardo found her alone in the evening sunshine that struck across her bed, singing to herself a childish song which broke off in a happy cry when she caught sight of her friend. As he took her hand, suddenly that which he had strongly suspected months before came into his mind with a sense of conviction. The difference in him showed itself in that now he acted without fear or hesitation.

"You are not really ill, you know," he said. "Wouldn't you like to get up?"

"Why, yes, yes! If I only could!" she whispered.

With his free hand he loosened the coverlet and sheet which were tightly tucked into the mattress, binding her frail body down to the bed. "Come then! Don't be afraid! Hold fast to my shoulder. By God's help you are going to walk to-day."

She clung to him and surrendered herself completely to his will; he lifted her and set her upright on her feet. "Now walk! walk!" he commanded.

She tottered at the first step, but feeling his arm supporting her, braced her shrunken muscles. Then she walked forward, one, two, three — six steps in all to the window, turned and walked back again. Her exaltation kept her faith firm in him; and she was too excited to feel giddy. Not until she reached the bed once more and he laid her gently down, did she give a little gasp. "Now rest! Don't speak! Do not tell anyone of this! I will come to-morrow evening and you shall walk again."

She closed her eyes; he laid his hand firmly upon her forehead. In a few minutes she was asleep.

Bernardo went to the house of the doctor who attended to the poor of that quarter of the city. Not finding him, he left a note in which he explained in detail all that had taken place and begged him to visit the child immediately. He also requested him not to speak of the matter to anyone.

As soon as Linda awoke, however, she related a marvellous story to her mother. She had seen angels all around Bernardo, wings, lilies and crowns as in

the little pictures that he had given her from time to time. But her mother upbraided her bitterly. She was a sharp, slatternly woman, ignorant, devout yet unscrupulous, unpractical yet cunning when she scented a chance of making money. She called in her neighbour for counsel and made the girl tell her tale over and over again. At the back of the woman's mind was the thought that she might be suspected of keeping the child in bed in order to make profit out of her illness. On the other hand if the cure were a miracle would not all the town up to the Bishop be interested and ready to assist her?

Consequently on the following evening when, about to preach at the Minerva, Bernardo visited Linda according to his promise, he fell into the trap which the women had prepared. He found the child apparently alone in the house as on the previous day. The doctor had not been to see her; she was not overtired by her efforts. "You told me that I should walk again to-day," she said to him eagerly.

Once more he lifted her from her bed and half-led her, half-carried her across the room. Suddenly she cried out: "Mother! Mother! I can walk! I am cured!"

The whole scene had been arranged beforehand. Her mother and the neighbour were waiting at the door. "It is a miracle! A holy miracle!" they cried as they ran in.

Bernardo laid the child down on her bed. "No, no!" he said sternly. "Listen to me! The girl could have walked before if you had made her try. The disease probably left her years ago. She only thought

she could not walk and you kept her to that belief. But now you must let her rest and not allow her to attempt to sit up any more to-day, you understand?"

But the women paid no heed to him; they were weeping and crying shrilly: "A miracle! A miracle! The child has walked! She is cured!"

Bernardo protested in vain; he was overwhelmed with shame and sorrow, but he thought that the fancies of these foolish women would be speedily explained away. "Leave the child in peace!" he commanded; his words were lost in the clamour.

The room and the house were filling with a throng of excited people, attracted by the women's cries. "It's a miracle! A miracle!" everyone was saying. "Then the friar is a saint!" cried someone. Bernardo covered his face and darting through them, hurried away from the house and along the darkening street.

II

He hastened to the church, followed by a number of women and children talking excitedly about the "miracle." The building was crowded, for, besides the usual congregation, the fame of the great philosophical preacher had drawn many unbelievers out of curiosity. In the sacristy there was considerable anxiety, for Bernardo was late; the rosary was already being recited. The preacher went straight into the pulpit.

As he mounted the steps there was a murmur of disappointment and hostility; disappointment because the curiosity was not to be gratified and hostility be-

cause the anti-clerical party detested Bernardo since the day when he had interrupted their demonstration. Several men moved as though to leave the church, but were met at the door by the women who had followed the friar. "Is he going to preach? He has just performed a miracle! He has healed little Linda Amori and made her walk!" they were saying. Several who were going out turned back incredulously, as the newcomers pressed their way in describing and passing on the news, until when the chanting of the rosary ceased the whole church hummed with talk.


But Bernardo did not notice it. He was conscious only of the sea of faces turned up towards him in the dim light of the crowded building, and of a great inward certainty that if he could only show these souls the way that he had found, they too would come inevitably to the same vision of Truth and Love as he. He had prepared no notes or scheme of thought as to what he should say to them; he gave utterance to the first words that came into his mind.

Immediately a sudden hush fell upon the crowd. His voice had gained a strange penetrating sweetness; there was a look in his face which compelled attention. Language and thought alike were utterly simple, far more direct, compelling and effective than the scholarly arguments which he had been wont to use. He pleaded for the Kingdom.

He reminded them of the insignificance to each man of material things, upon which the apostles of mere economic progress set such store, in comparison with the real internal world, the familiar thoughts in company of which the spirit dwells; of how little external

circumstances could mitigate bodily pain and mental sorrow, when all the while the cultivation of the sense of the Divine Presence could make a Heaven in the heart of the poorest outcast, or of the victim of the bitterest experiences of life. Would they also believe that life was a shallow thing of sense, and truth a shallow web of reasoning? Religion was far more vital, far more true than science or philosophy, because it lay at the centre of the soul and not amid the outer spheres of rational searching. Philosophy was made in looking upon life, religion grew in living. Could his kingdom be elsewhere than within a man's own soul? The rich man sought his kingdom amid physical and worldly pleasures; that was why he could not pass the needle's eye of understanding. No one could realise the Kingdom of the Soul but the poor in spirit, the mourners and the outcast, and only they by giving up self-will.

The poor man's life was an unrelenting warfare; see how the faith came to his aid! In doubt and fear were peaceful thoughts of the eternal watching Presence and of the host of angels near at hand to succour through his prayers; in the tedium of long hard days were the tender thoughts of the Divine Mother, the most compassionate of all mothers, the mother of the humble; in hours of pain were thoughts of the suffering Saviour, united to man closer by each pang that we endure; in the bitterness of shame and sin's defilement were the absolution of His ministry and the promise of redemption by His death; in work and battle and the hour of death were courageous thoughts of immortality and the victorious rest.



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In tone and style the sermon was emotional and ecstatic, the outburst of his quickened passion for God's glory. Regarded from an intellectual standpoint, he had often preached more finely, but the effect was now entirely disproportionate to the words. It was as though they were merely a channel for the outpouring of a mightier influence than thought.

He went on to tell them something of the Kingdom as he found it—the peace, the joy, the infinite love transfiguring the world, until it seemed that through his own intense conviction he caused them to share his vision, and passed on, as it were, by mystic power of suggestion, a portion of his own experience. The crowd gave up their minds to him, sitting or standing in the hushed and darkened building rapt and motionless, feeling beneath the steady music of the rhythmic phrases the presence of a Truth which held their hearts. Every eye was fixed upon the preacher, the lips of most were parted in a straining wonder and self-forgetfulness, while tears were trickling down the cheeks of many who knew not that they wept.

Suddenly in the middle of the crowded nave a woman fainted. There was a stifled cry, the clatter of a falling chair, followed by the murmur of voices swelling louder and louder as one after another people awoke to the noise from the spell of the preaching, turned round, asked nervously what had occurred or stood up in their places to see better.


All at once above the growing clamour a derisive voice was heard to cry: "If he has done one miracle, here is a chance for a second!" The next instant the church was in an uproar. Everyone started up;

chairs were overturned; women screamed with terror. Bernardo's enemies seized the opportunity for making a demonstration of their hostility. His sympathisers turned upon them indignantly; exhortations, jeers and insults were hurled across the building. The shock of the interruption was all the greater for the tense religious strain that had preceded it. Where peace had reigned was now a surging tumult of disorder. Bernardo cried aloud to the brawlers; the noise ceased for a moment and all turned to look at him. "Stop preaching! Come down from the pulpit!" came the answering shout of many voices. For the sake of the women and still more for the sanctity of the place and the Sacrament screened upon the altar, Bernardo instantly obeyed. There was a roar of triumph and of mingled protest; the hostile crowd poured out into the square, followed by the rest of those present, some expostulating and shouting, while many women hysterically were supported homewards dazed with fright. Benediction was given to an empty church.

III

As Bernardo on his way back to the convent passed the house of Linda Amori he had a sudden presentiment of evil. There were lights in the windows and a whispering crowd of women were gathered round the door. One of them caught sight of him and cried out viciously: "So much for your precious miracle! The girl is dying after what you have done to her!"

Bernardo hurried through them and went up to Linda's room. The doctor, a young Freemason, was



bending over the bed. The mother was wringing her hands in a state of impotent agitation. As soon as she saw the friar she burst into vehement abuse. Linda was unconscious.

From a second woman in the doorway Bernardo gathered what had happened. The crowd, which had filled the house as he was leaving it little more than an hour before, had excited the girl with their clamour. Someone had disbelieved her story and said she had never walked. Attempting to prove it, she had risen from her bed with a great effort, tottered a step and fallen fainting upon the floor. Then they had sent for the doctor.

The woman continued her complaints and abuse. Bernardo answered quietly: "You disobeyed me in allowing the child to leave her bed again."

The doctor turned and faced him. "If you remain in this room," he said, "I shall leave it!"

Bernardo bowed his head and went away.

IV

It was unfortunate that it should have been Tomaso who first heard the story of the "pretended miracle." Linda's mother related it to the servant of the nuns, to whom Tomaso was spiritual director, with all such malicious details as her imagination could supply. The doctor told his version of the affair to the Mother Superior, when he visited her to give an injection of arsenic for her anæmia. He said that he had been aware ever since he examined the girl three months before that there was at present no disease to prevent

her from walking, but he had realised that the necessary strength must be given her by his tonics before she could make the first attempts under his direction. He supposed that the meddlesome friar had somehow discovered these facts from the girl and had tried to make a reputation for sanctity out of the circumstances. Tomaso was naturally shocked when the Mother Superior related this, and he returned to his convent in a fume of excitement. He told Domenico that he had always suspected Bernardo of spiritual pride.

Domenico was sincerely sorry and only half believed the slander. He had watched Bernardo's gloom and pallor through the summer and attributed it to some intellectual struggle with doubts born of his reading Modernist literature. He had even imagined that Bernardo was about to leave the convent. But he did not believe that he would stoop to such a trick as Tomaso's story implied. He thought that Bernardo was still unwell and nervous, and was confirmed in opinion by the tale he had heard of the interruption of his sermon at the Minerva. He commiserated with the preacher, but considered that he had surely been imprudent and must have given some sort of provocation. Domenico's own sermons never created disturbance.

Filippo characteristically took the blackest view of the incidents, not out of uncharitableness, but from sheer love of sensation. In his excitement he did not comprehend the full weight of the charges.

The Guardian listened to Tomaso's story with brows knit and lowered eyes. He was annoyed that any



friar should get himself so much talked about. When the story was finished he made no comment, and Tomaso went away filled with vague disquiet.

The next evening Bernardo asked to be allowed to preach in a small town, not far from Assisi, which was notorious for its irreligion. Some people called it "the city that makes a jest of God." The Guardian looked at Bernardo keenly. "Do you imagine that they will listen to you? It is far more likely that they will ill-treat and insult you."

"Perhaps; but I should like to go," he answered.

The Guardian gave the desired permission for the following Sunday. He had heard of the tumult at the Minerva, and he did not suppose that a repetition of the scene would do any harm in the little city across the plain.

Bernardo was filled with a thirst for men's souls. Instead of hurrying through the streets with nervous energy wrapt in his own thoughts and looking neither to right or left, he now lingered and watched the faces of those he passed with an infinite yearning to read their hearts and to help them to a knowledge of the Kingdom which he had found. His attitude seemed to invite the loiterers to address him, which in his present notoriety they very frequently did. One of the clearest signs of the change in him was the attention, kindly or hostile, which the world paid him.

A number of youths desired to speak to him; they accosted him in the streets or sought him in the sacristy. Many were moved by curiosity, some by insolent hostility, and a few by a real desire for help. Several posed as intellectuals and tried upon him the

crudest weapons of the rationalistic armoury. He never argued with his questioners: he replied to each in turn with a sweet justness that disarmed, showing how crude and futile were the series of interrogations they had planned to puzzle him. They went away subdued, sometimes to return singly and in humbler mood.

Occasionally his answers stung them with a quiet irony, but he was quick to heal as soon as he had wounded. One youth boasted that he had lost all his "illusions."

"Indeed?" he answered, "have you then lost your faith in the value of your own opinion?" He added a few sentences that summed up his philosophy. "There is no greater illusion than for anyone of us to believe that what he thinks is true. The only thoughts we must ultimately trust are those which spring directly from our deepest will. But we must be very careful and very humble when we choose what thoughts we *mean* to think."

Another youth said affectedly that religion was unnecessary for him because he refrained from sinning out of good taste.

"I hope you will die as gracefully as you have lived so far," replied Bernardo. "You must beware that you do not spoil your pose by surrender to God at last."

"I could believe in religion if it were not for the miracles!" said a third.

"But religion is the greatest miracle of all, and it is essentially miraculous. It is just living in two worlds, and using the invisible unaccountable forces behind the visible things. By religion alone we trans-

cend the web of our intellectual and sensuous illusions. It is only by its irrationality that we can escape from the net of rational uniformity which we have woven round our souls. Miracle is not the proof of religion, but its point."

"But many great men, scientists and writers, are rejecting religion to-day," they still objected.

"No. Great scientists, great writers, possibly; but not great *men*. No man can be great in whose mind besides his lesser thoughts, there is not room for God."

In manner Bernardo was simple, persuasive and at ease; intensely alive to the present as though past and future did not exist for him. He gave his whole attention to each speaker, noted a thousand little signs and acted instantly upon these indications. He appeared to read each mind intuitively, for often he did not realise how telling were his answers until he marked how they had told. His rich subliminal nature supplied ideas and images of which he had never thought; his replies had deeper meanings than he understood before their utterance, being often so direct and irreflective that they seemed to be inspired by an external Mind.

It is an Italian custom for a number of men to escort an honoured visitor as he moves about the streets, in which attendance men of all classes mingle freely. These youths did not wish to honour Bernardo, but actually they did so. Sometimes when they left him their animosity returned, if only because they endeavoured to maintain their pose in one another's eyes. But at the moment of their utterance his words

invoked involuntary admiration. For a few days after his sermon at the Minerva Bernardo became a power in the place.

V

His gain in concentration, peace and sympathy sprang from a profound and immutable unity of soul. Hitherto there had always existed a certain disharmony or multiplicity within him, so that the speech of another started divergent trains of thought according to the different ways he viewed it, which rendered his immediate answers inadequate expressions of his intellectual force. He seldom acted instantly with his full energy, while on those isolated occasions when under strong emotion he had done so, he had always seemed to be beside himself, transported or inspired.

But now in his whole being was one harmony, due to the absolute predominance of the mystic mood since its emphasis upon the night of ecstasy. Henceforth his thoughts and acts responded only to his highest spiritual motive, the currents passing, as it were, along a single channel, cut deep in the hour of intense emotion. The suggestion of the voices still remained with him as the negation of his individual will, their influence being reinforced by constant renewal of the unifying moment. He did not will or initiate this consciously; it came as a gift without warning or especial effort on his part. Praying in his cell or in the chapel of the crucifix the wave of "luminous darkness" would well up within him and ebbing leave his soul renewed from the Infinite Source of Life.

CHAPTER III

THE BABBLE OF TONGUES

I

UNDER a lowering sky Bernardo set forth upon his mission to preach in the small city which made a jest of God. As he hurried along the miry roads across the plain, the hedges were already brown and wintry, though above the fresh-ploughed fields the stunted elms, stripped of their foliage for fodder, still upheld the long bare orange tendons of the vines. The far hills, muffled in low mists, were of a sodden wine-colour; the scarcely mottled pall of cloud let through a wan, grey light.

The little town was still enclosed within her mediæval walls, albeit a few modern buildings with rows of shutterless windows disfigured the approach to it, while factories, occupying desecrated convents, upreared their sooty chimneys amid embattled towers and tall campanili.

Entering the ancient gate, Bernardo overtook a troupe of travelling acrobats trudging beside a donkey-cart that carried their stock in trade. The party consisted of a short, oldish man with a dogged, tired face, a strong-looking surly youth and a lanky boy in outworn, outgrown garments. In the cart sat a careworn woman and a girl of ten or twelve, whose rack-

ing cough and hollowed cheeks showed plainly that she was dying of consumption. She was wearing the shabby coat of the elder man, buttoned grotesquely round her little body. They stared at Bernardo sullenly as he passed in beside them, but none of the sad-looking little troupe responded to his greeting.

Reaching the church, he found it almost empty. After the bell ceased, he and the priest waited awhile before beginning Mass. Eventually Bernardo gave a short address to five old women and one old man who was too deaf to hear it. The priest said it was useless trying to get the people to Mass nowadays; he could not understand why Bernardo had come so far to preach. The manager of the chief factory was omnipotent in town, and, being a Freemason, used his influence to destroy religion. Following his lead, the school-teachers, under pretence of giving evening lectures upon popular science, sowed contempt for the old practices. It was now thought to be a sign of the progressive spirit not to have one's children baptised. All this visible change had taken place within the last five years. The priest apparently acquiesced in the situation, partly from lack of energy, partly from well-founded fears; he slunk about his parish often insulted and only tolerated because personally inoffensive.

From the sacristy Bernardo went out into the square where the acrobats were giving their performance. The care-worn woman was playing an accordion; the little daughter beating mechanically upon a drum, interrupted from time to time by a violent fit of coughing. The elder man, with his face whitened, was

wearing a dirty striped smock and wide white trousers, a little conical cap on the side of his head. He was the clown of the party. The surly youth and the lean boy were clad in patched tights and thin vests that left their brown arms bare. They were doing various turns and tumbles on a strip of carpet laid over the mud, while the clown imitated them in a drearily comic manner, shouting jests whose humour consisted of crude obscenity. The crowd formed a large ring around the tumblers and apparently enjoyed the witless sallies.

Bernardo looked on sadly for a minute, his heart wrung with pity. The people on his side of the ring edged away from him contemptuously until he stood conspicuously alone, when it occurred to one of them that to molest a wretched friar, who was bold enough to show his face in the square, would be better fun than watching the acrobats.

"You see, we find this show more amusing than yours yonder," he cried, pointing to the church; "why don't you paint your face to make things over there a bit more lively?"

There was a roar of jeers from the crowd and a circle formed around Bernardo. The clown unwilling to lose his audience, thrust himself in the midst.

"Come now, let's see what you can do! You could beat the drum at any rate," he cried.

"I am afraid your little girl will not do that much longer, my friend," answered Bernardo gently, then, raising his voice, he said to the staring crowd: "You see how this poor fellow whitens his face and makes his jests for you, but all the while he knows that his

child is dying and that she is hungry, so he is sick at heart. Now, as for you, you are all clowns also. You have all whitened your faces and put on a swaggering careless air in the face of God. But all the while you know in your hearts that death is waiting for you! This man makes his jokes to win money to buy bread. What do you gain by yours? Do *your* children die any the less because they are not baptised? Is your life here any less hard for you because you have flung aside all hope of another? You try to drown your griefs at the wine-shop now that you will not go for comfort to God's house. But you are the clowns in sight of Heaven and not this man; and it is the Devil and Death and Pain that are laughing at you!"

The crowd stared spellbound, subdued by the expression of his pale face and awed by his bitter words, until suddenly a voice yelled some coarse jeer from the back of the ring and a hand flung a clod of mud, that, hitting him on the neck, bespattered his cheek and habit. For a moment longer he confronted the furious throng, then turned and walked slowly through them, mud, stones and filth whirling beside him and now and again striking him on the back. Above the tumult somebody cried:

"Enough! Let the fool go! He means well!"

But the storm of jeers and insults followed him down the street and through the embattled gate. He kept on steadily until they died away, then turned and looked back upon the little town.

"Et quicumque non receperit vos, neque audierit sermones vestros, exeuntes foras de domo vel civitate excutite pulverem de pedibus vestris. Amen dico vo-

bis, tolerabilius erit terræ Sodomorum et Gomorrhæorum in die judicii quam illi civitati!" In a flash that was like a glimpse of doom he realised the significance of those words.

II

When at length, drenched to the skin and weary, Bernardo reached the convent, he found a messenger from Donna Elisa's house awaiting him. The servant said the old woman was dying and besought him to come at once. Without breaking his long fast that had lasted since the early morning, he set forth again directly, gathering the details of her illness on the way up to the city. She had been growing slowly weaker and more morose throughout the summer, often sitting for hours together in her chair without moving or speaking. Nevertheless, she had come to the Minerva Church to hear him preach and had evidently been deeply agitated by the tumult at the conclusion of the sermon. The next day she had a sort of paralytic seizure; the doctor said her life could only be a question of hours.

Bernardo found the house filled with nearly a dozen noisy people, disputing, screaming and turning the place upside down; the old woman's relations and heirs having been brought to Assisi by a telegram from her servant. Donna Elisa lay rigid and speechless, rolling her eyes with impotent fury while they ransacked the house in jealous rivalry, ostensibly to find her will, but actually because they feared that someone would steal the secret hoard of money which

she was reputed to possess. Two women especially were for ever bustling in and out of the dying woman's room, vying with each other in hypocritical commiseration and petty attentions which only exasperated the helpless sufferer. Their black looks notwithstanding, Bernardo insisted upon their retiring and recited the Confiteor aloud. Donna Elisa made what little sign she could of penitence, after which he pronounced the Absolution. He sent the servant for the parish priest to administer the last rites that night.

Then seeking only to gain a few last hours of rest for the dying woman, he called her hated relatives into an adjoining room and besought them to leave the house or to postpone their further search until the morrow. For her will, he said he did not know if she had made one, they had best consult the notaries of the town; for the store of money which she was reputed to possess secreted, he told them he had good reason to believe that it no longer existed, since some five months before she had placed in his hands the sum of thirteen thousand, two hundred and forty-five francs for the benefit of the school for destitute children opened that summer in her house.

These last words were received in icy silence and followed by a storm of fury. One old woman, wearing a dark-red wig, shrieking denounced him for a thief and shook in his face her wizened fists that were filthy with turning out the rubbish of cupboards and dusty corners. A younger woman spat upon his habit. Together they screamed and raged as though possessed in the venom of their disappointed greed, while the men, gesticulating, shouted one above the other

that they would have recourse to law. Bernardo felt that all the jeers of the godless city were less vile than this sordid uproar. Had he moved, they would have followed him and continued their clamour even in the room where the dying woman lay; he folded his arms and stood watching them with his back against her door, until at length, the vituperation of their rage exhausted, they left the house with threats and curses to concert elsewhere their plans of action.

When Bernardo returned to Donna Elisa's bedside he saw a gleam of triumph in her eyes.

The next sound that broke the silence of the great empty house was the tinkling of the small bell which precedes the Sacrament. The last rites were administered and Elisa Garlenda died before the dawn.

III

The bell for prime was rung, the office was read, but still Bernardo had not left his cell. When at length Filippo went up to call him, he found him stretched unconscious. He had fainted from exhaustion and want of food.


Filippo first thought that he had once more fallen into the state in which he and Girolamo had discovered him in the chapel some days before. But alarmed at his pallor and the fact that he could not wake him, he characteristically jumped to the conclusion that he was dead. Perhaps he had poisoned himself, perhaps he had died of heart-disease, perhaps he had been murdered — but who cared to know the thousand irresponsible ideas that rushed through Filippo's head at

every unusual occurrence? Even in that quiet conventional routine he contrived to live in a whirl of sensation.

Girolamo rushed to the cell to find Bernardo already recovering. He put him to bed, fed him and brooded over him, patting his hand and murmuring softly like a mother nursing her ailing child. Bernardo's health had been undermined by the long struggle and sorrow of the summer, by his sleeplessness, mortifications and abstinence, and latterly by his strenuous activity and the intensity of his emotional life.

While Bernardo had been tramping the miry roads and striving to convert the godless city, Domenico in the convent had taken singular advantage of his absence. He had suggested to the Guardian the expediency of examining Bernardo's writings privately, in view of the strong suspicion of modernism which he entertained regarding his opinions, coupled with the Holy Father's injunctions in the Encyclical "Pas-cendi" as to the vigilance which those in authority should exercise.

Personally, Silvestro did not approve such methods, but he could not doubt their wisdom, reinforced by the Holy Father's words. He accompanied Domenico to Bernardo's cell and sanctioned the removal of the piles of manuscript, feeling himself at a loss to cope with them. Domenico devoted his Sunday to looking them over. He found little in the history of the Order beyond careful sifting of original authorities and a scholarly method of setting forth moderate conclusions. But scattered among the larger work were loose sheets of paper covered with random notes,



jotted down without arrangement, the tenor of which appalled him. With horror, not unmingled with a certain satisfaction that his suspicions were vindicated, he read such passages as follow:—

“A sort of psychological landslide has carried the city of human Truth from its foundations on the heights of authority and logic down to the valley of everyday experience. All dogmas will henceforth be tested empirically and will be proven true or false, according to their value for life in a new spiritual and moral order.”

“Let us imagine ourselves looking back at the present from ten thousand years hence. How much of our ‘Catholic Truth’ survives? The fact of its permanence will be the proof of its ‘Truth’ and ‘Catholicity.’ That which is dead will be *ipso facto* false, and will have been so from the beginning. Let the theologians of the Church to-day beware lest they risk the life of the essential germ, for the sake of husks, that is, interpretations of the period, which are only mere ‘provincialisms’ of time.”

Domenico read these passages aloud to the Guardian with a proper show of reluctance, which he did not at that moment feel. They agreed that the manuscripts should be sent to Rome. On the morrow, therefore, as soon as Bernardo was sufficiently recovered to be interrogated, the Guardian went to his cell and told him bluntly what had taken place. Bernardo pleaded that such rough notes as these were in no way intended for publication, nor did they express his personal and subjective grounds of faith, being no more than random thoughts. But he could not honestly

repudiate such speculations. In his heart he was only thankful that they signified so little for him now in comparison with what they did when he wrote them down. He was grieved that they gave offence to the Guardian and Domenico; the expression of any personal convictions, orthodox or modernist, was of so little importance compared with the risk of hurting a brother's faith. He would willingly have destroyed all he had written, but that he feared his motive might be misunderstood. The conversation led to no change of decision; the writings were despatched to Rome for the judgment of the General of the Order.

IV

Meanwhile Donna Elisa's will was found in the safe keeping of a notary who had drawn it up for her about five months before. Herein she bequeathed the larger part of her property, the house and all that she could legally dispose of, to the institution that the citizens of Assisi had started for the benefit of destitute children. Her relatives could not upset the will, but they took their revenge in slander.

They bribed the servant to declare that ever since Bernardo had entered the house her mistress had been entirely under his influence, and that she had been obliged by him to burn her former will in which she bequeathed her property to her family, on the same day that, as they expressed it, she had been robbed of her money. In their first outburst of rage her relatives had designated her as "that loathsome hag"; but now they changed their tactics, and built up an

imaginary figure, of an enfeebled old lady on the brink of the grave, coerced by an ambitious friar to surrender her property under threat of eternal fire. They piously blamed themselves for having kept away from her owing to "family misunderstandings."

"To think of our poor dear Aunt Elisa in the clutches of that ruffian!" wailed the young woman who had spat on Bernardo's habit. "She used to be so enlightened in her distrust of priests. But towards the end her brain was doubtless growing weaker, and that was his opportunity."

The doctor corroborated when he affirmed that the old woman's death had been hastened by brooding and nervous strain.

This scandal revived the former slanders concerning the healing of Linda Amori. Old Amalia Stanga, in spite of her gout, hobbled about the town declaring that the friar had hypnotised the girl, that is, he had practised magic, for which crime he ought to be burnt. According to "la Stanga," everyone knew that an innocent child was needed in such hellish games and everyone knew also that Elisa Garlenda was a witch who doubtless had practised devilish rites with the friar, her comrade in sin. This story was none the less often repeated because it sounded somewhat mediæval. Trinci, the chemist, as a leading light of rationalism, held to the doctor's account of the pretended miracle. He and his anti-clerical friends professed to despise Bernardo as much as once they had hated him.

All these people gossiped and raged, partly because the scandal chimed with their own political opinions,

but chiefly because the monotony of their lives made precious any outlet whatsoever for emotional expression. Bernardo was not the conventional type of friar that they tolerated; not understanding, they mistrusted him. His activity upset their theories that all friars were idle parasites living upon other men's labour; his "conversions" tended to keep up the old "superstitions" which they detested. The better class in the town took little or no part in the agitation; they busied themselves with their estates, their houses, their daily business, charities, banks, institutions; but for the larger number, this local scandal for some days brought a quickening of interest in life.

In a larger city the excitement of a small set of the partisans of those directly injured would have expended itself amid the mass of the apathetic and indifferent. In Assisi the few who were personally affected tossed the cause of their indignation to and fro until it rebounded with ever increasing force from others equally excited.


The climax of the storm was reached when a number of youths marched down to the convent by way of making a demonstration of sympathy with the rich relatives of Donna Elisa. Had they not hesitated at which point to attack, and thus given time to a lay-brother to close and bar the chapel door, some deed of sacrilege or destruction might have been committed. They battered on the doors, broke a window, and shouted blasphemies in the court-yard for the best part of an hour, frightening poor Filippo into tears. Encountering Tomaso on their way back to the city, they

hustled him until he was speechless with fear and fury.

The Guardian alone surveyed the situation calmly. He saw that a scandal had been worked up as an excuse for a tumult out of the slenderest evidence of wrong. But none the less the peace of the community was lamentably disturbed, and there was nothing he disliked so much as uproar. It was practically certain that if Bernardo appeared in the city he would be insulted; obviously it was expedient that he should leave the convent, secretly and at once.

Several reasons indicated the Hermitage of the Carceri as the best refuge for the moment. To send him away from Assisi to another house of the Order, pending the investigation of the charge of modernism, was not at all desirable. Also it would be to accept defeat and to appear to endorse the further charges. At the bottom of his mind there lay a half-conscious but preponderating reason: the sanctity of the holy solitude, so venerable a nurse of sainthood, so potent to make trial of the spirits, "whether they be of God or no."

To a mental habit such as the Father Guardian's this problem would not seem beyond solution.



CHAPTER IV

AT THE HERMITAGE

I

AN eyrie, not a house; a cluster of tiny cells, like the nest of a wild bee in a wall, hung out over a precipice; a deep cleft in the mountain side falling away for a thousand feet in a torrent of rocks and boulders. A glen, its steep slopes clothed in exquisite verdure of ilex, oak, beech, maple, hornbeam and many other trees, its thickets threaded with green paths. Above, the bleak grey mountain, treeless, desolate; below, a glimpse, as through a loophole, of far blue hills across the plain. A high wall enclosing the wood, as if the long, steep, stony and shadowless track upwards from the city were not sufficient to ward off the world; an arched entrance into a small triangular court-yard, set with two ancient wells; a dark refectory with worm-eaten tables, placed there by San Bernardino six centuries ago; a tiny chapel built to hold perhaps a dozen worshippers; tortuous stairways up and down like ladders, where in passing one bends almost double; a few small cells, each measuring possibly ten feet by seven, the passage leading to them hewn out of the living rock — such is the sanctuary of the Carceri, beloved of saintly hermits from all time.


In spring or summer, during the bright brief hours of sunshine when the rays surmount the shoulders of the enclosing slopes, the wood rings with the song of birds, the green ways smile with innumerable flowers under the flicker of leaves, the small bell tinkles dreamily and the weary toiler up the rocky path thinks to himself: "How sweet a shrine of peace is here!" But in the mist and rain of dark monotonous November days, in the long bitter weeks of snow and ice, above all, in the cold and loneliness of unending winter nights, the hermitage seems to be an outpost of man's little world of ordered thought towards the teeming infinite, a lighthouse on a lonely rock upstanding amid tides of spiritual life at war. "*Quoniam non est nobis colluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principes et potestates, adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum, contra spiritualia nequitiae, in coelestibus.*"

II

Besides the two lay brothers, Pacifico the cook, and Amedeo the gardener, there was only one friar at the hermitage on the November morning when Bernardo reached it. Father Fidelis was above all men fitted to be a hermit. Nearly fifteen years before he had been sent to the Carceri at his own petition, and since then only the most urgent business had drawn him down the mountain to the town. Born of peasant parentage, he loved the open life in sunshine, wind or rain; his face was tanned to a rough brick-red and furrowed with deep lines round the

eyes from much frowning in the sunlight. He seldom spoke and was most content when he could feel that he had passed his day without opening his lips except to God. He liked to talk to the wild woodland creatures far better than to man. He would sit for hours watching the beetles rolling their little balls of dung, the hurrying ants in their teeming thoroughfares and citadels, the wild bee with its nest in the crack of the wall, the spider and the crane-fly on the rockside of the corridor inside the convent, the grasshoppers, the crickets, the lady-birds, the flies and moths of every size and shape. He loved the great toads in the glen, the lizards on the walls, the stoats, the rats, the squirrels. He was bitterly aggrieved when Brother Pacifico set a trap for the mice that consumed the meagre supplies in the store-room, and as none were ever caught in it, he was suspected of tampering with the spring. Whenever he walked outside the garden after rain, he tenderly lifted the earthworms he found upon the highroads and put them back upon the broken soil. One day he saw some peasant boys pursuing a harmless snake with sticks. He drove them away, caught and carried off the reptile, and judging it to be too late in the year to let it loose in the convent wood, he made a house for it in a box filled with dried moss and leaves and kept it in his cell for the whole winter, feeding it when it awoke from its long sleep with bread and milk in a saucer.

As for the birds, Fidelis knew all their notes and their nesting-places, and the incidents of their lives were the events of his own. The arrival of the swallows was a festival for him; their building under the



convent roof, the feeding of the young, their earliest flying lessons from their parents were matters of the highest earthly import. One year a pair of martens built inside his cell; he never closed his window till they left in the autumn for warmer lands.

Brother Pacifico believed that as he lingered in the wood, the birds came and sat on Fidelis' shoulders and listened to his sermons and advice, as they had listened to St. Francis. It is certain that every creature appeared to be perfectly tame with him. He summed up the life of the wood and watched over it like Providence. If a robin or wren began to build in an old tin or a hole within reach of the convent cat, he would find some device of his own for protecting it, or remove the temptation of the site, as a hint to the bird to find a wiser plan. But in winter Fidelis grew taciturn and grave as Nature round him; it seemed that his life narrowed in with the season. His face had a wistful look as though he were disappointed or longing for the wider world. But that was not what he yearned for; he was merely waiting for spring.


At first he was troubled by the thought of a stranger sharing his solitude. Like most lonely men, he was over-sensitive of criticism and feared that Bernardo might think he wasted too much food and thought upon the wild things of the wood. In his simplicity he was shy of the newcomer, especially on account of what Silvestro wrote about his learning. He was afraid that he would have to listen to his conversation during recreation. But Bernardo did not wish to talk any more than he did. He only longed for a perpetual silence wherein he might realise his inward

joy. He thanked God on his side as for a special grace that he had one so unworldly for his companion.

For the first two or three days the two friars scarcely exchanged a word. Fidelis was nervous and watchful. He could not understand Bernardo's courtesy of manner; in part he distrusted it; in part it made him conscious of his own want of refinement. But at length one day he found Bernardo sitting on a low bank in the wood, staring before him with lips parted and a look of rapture in his eyes. A young robin was perched upon his shoulder. To Fidelis there could be no better warrant for the newcomer than the confidence of a bird.

III

Bernardo's days were spent in prayer and meditation. Besides his daily Mass and the reciting of the Office, he had scarcely any duties to fulfil, no confessions to listen to, no sermons to prepare. He arose in the darkness long before the icy dawn, and descended with the others to the chapel, where they said Prime, Lauds and their Masses by the light of two flickering tapers. Usually during Meditation, Brother Pacifico snored. They drank their black coffee and ate a hunch of black bread in the refectory with a guttering candle between them. They returned to their cells in the grey of dawn, when the hoar-frost diapered the little windows. Pacifico would bring Bernardo a small *scaldino* containing hot wood embers; Bernardo would ask him to take it to the Guardian, who sent it back with a peremptory order that he



was to keep it and hold it on his knee while he read or wrote.

But Bernardo had few books and his manuscripts had all been sent to Rome. He did not fear that they would be condemned; it mattered little now what his thoughts had been some months ago; they hardly seemed to be his own. He had been taught by Truth herself, "not in figures or by words." "He was delivered from the multitude of opinions." He made his faith the touch-stone of all his thoughts; he had passed by the road of the empirical to the Absolute, by individual aspiration and experience to where individuality merges into the Universal.


The false mystic delights in mysteries and subtleties, Bernardo only asked for light to simplify. He examined his ecstasies because of the delight they gave him; he considered whether they might not be inspired by self-love or sensual joy. If inward voices came, he questioned them; were they demonic? Were they natural? Was he sure that he was not talking to himself? But the answer came directly incontestably. He simply could not hold the doubt within his mind.

He reasoned no more about his faith; that he could not do so was the essence of his mental change. Sometimes he would meditate upon some great mystery, putting aside all his old thoughts about it and the explanations and definitions he had read. He simply held the thought before his mind and let his imagination wander discursively about it. Suddenly it would seem as though a great light flared up in his soul and that in an instant by an intellectual vision he

saw it, comprehended it essentially. When the rapturous moment passed he felt waves of warmth and joy surge through his flesh and then he would sit quite still for hours gazing before him, seeing nothing, staring after the light that had vanished away, in that state of mental prayer "whereby the soul is made the sister of the angels and abides with her Bridegroom on the board of crucified desire."

Physically he had never endured such hardships as now in the bitter winter nights and days in the little Hermitage upon the mountains. The food was rougher than he had ever before eaten; both day and night the water froze in the pitcher in his cell. Pacifico recognised how different was the constitution of this delicate scholar from that of the fathers who usually lived at the Hermitage, but all his efforts to give Bernardo comforts availed nothing. Bernardo was touched by his kindness, but would not accept anything that the others had not also. If his body was numb with cold, he did not notice it; he felt in need of nothing.

Had he had still his worldly duties to fulfil he could not have enjoyed such entire illumination. He wholly opened his heart and absorbed incalculable treasure, feeling as though this mystic flood were slowly penetrating the opaque places in his soul. At times he was so utterly detached from earth and absorbed in the internal reality that all other things around were merely shadows. At others he shared the life of Nature with an intimacy which he had never known before. He knew that God's will was not to destroy the world of the senses but to perfect it; he looked on



all creation transfigured in the vision of the Creator.

IV

Meanwhile the excitement and gossip concerning Bernardo in Assisi was gradually dying. People recalled his gentleness and intellectual refinement; his penitents openly deplored his disappearance. The friars were beset with inquiries about him; some insisted that he was still at San Damiano; others that he had been sent away owing to the jealousy of the priests.

Donna Elisa's relations had already come to litigation over the division of that half of her property which she could not alienate from them. Common-sense urged that the money she had given to Bernardo would be far better spent upon the school for the destitute children than upon the futile controversies of the lawyers.

Meanwhile Linda Amori had recovered from the shock of her fainting fit without the doctor's aid, refusing to take his drugs. She declared that she had been healed by Bernardo, that she would walk again for him but for nobody else, and that her illness was a punishment for disobeying him. She called for him all day long without ceasing, till her mother in despair besought the friars, that, wherever he was, Bernardo should be sent to see the child.

Finally, as a result of her importunity, about the middle of December a message came to the Carceri from Father Silvestro, and on several evenings in the rainy dusk Bernardo went down to the city, passed

in at the gate with his cowl drawn over his head, and so reached the girl's room unobserved. He prayed with her, lifted her gently and held her up while she moved first one foot and then the other, laying her down when she grew giddy. To strengthen her limbs he put her on the floor and made her crawl.

The girl gained strength at his every visit; a vital force seemed to stream into her fragile body from his presence, until by the end of January she was able to walk alone. There was now no more talk of miracles, albeit one aged canon of the cathedral suggested that Bernardo possessed the "*gratiæ sanitatum*"—precious but natural healing gifts.

V

It is midnight, and outside the snow is whirling on the gusts of a bitter wind and piling higher and higher in drifts against the parapet, until the small triangular court-yard resembles the hollow in a pillow. On the sheltered side it lies deep; there are white mounds round the well-heads with a dip between them and a gradual slope up to the corner, where the wall on the cliff-edge joins the buildings.

Bernardo is on his knees in the tiny chapel, unconscious of time, of cold, of physical discomfort, lost in that blissful contemplation, which saints have called the "Prayer of Quiet." The faint red lamp beside the Blessed Sacrament quivers and flickers in the gusty draught, casting a dim glow over the blackened vault and setting a-dance the giant shadow of the kneeling friar.

Towards morning the wind shifts and the showers turn to rain. The melting snow slides down in heavy loads from the roof, converting the court-yard into a lake of slush that overflows and pours into the gorge. Suddenly in one instant through all the glen the white burden is loosed; being shaken first from the highest boughs upon the steep, it falls from tree to tree, and gathering weight, sweeps with the roar of an avalanche down the ravine, carrying with it a torrent of stones. The wind grows less bitter, but abates nothing of its fury; it tears in sudden and terrific blasts up the small cleft and over the treeless mountain, until it seems as though the buildings, huddled in the hollow, must be wrenched from their perch and whirled away.

All night long, as Bernardo kneels, he watches, as from a lonely peak thrust up towards the Infinite, the perpetual work and warfare of celestial armies. He comprehends how the ordered world is builded by the senses and the thoughts of men, or by God's thoughts and ministers in man, and how at all points Powers and Chaos strive to oppose Creation. In apocalyptic pageantry of ancient symbol he sees the Principalities and Rulers of Darkness, as personal and disincarnate wreckers of the Kingdom, leading men's souls to death by the glittering lure of sensual dreams, rearing obstructions in his path by specious illusions of material gain and self-advancement, sapping the ancient pillars of dogmatic precept by shallow cant of self-development — as though true realisation of the soul lay not in union with God. He feels the agonies and triumphs of a thousand contests; he trembles with the peril of a million souls. He burns with a passion

for strife, for sacrifice, for suffering; his heart becomes as the world's heart and the spiritual loss of all men as his own. With head thrown back and pale hands clasped in supplication he cries hour after hour: "Why wilt Thou not let me go, O Lord? Thou didst bid me give out of my poverty that which Thou makest me to hoard in wealth!"

Then suddenly a voice within him whispers: "Tarry no longer! Go! Thou hast seen and thou shalt teach men and convert! Preach, write, defend thyself against the unjust accusations of thy foes and mine! They are keeping thee here prompted by the counsel of Evil, but my gifts to thee must not be cast away. Only believe in thy vision, and thy victories shall justify thy going."

With throbbing heart he listens to the inward voice; the great world, menaced by the flooding tide of materialism and godlessness, seems to be calling with a million voices.

"Wilt thou then prove a coward in God's battle? Is not the warrant in thy soul sufficient? The precious days, weeks, months go by and souls are dying, whom thou mightest save. Why dost thou hesitate to begin thy work? Art thou afraid of what thy foes may say of thee? If thou await their word, thou wilt be feeble and grey-headed before they let thee go."

Bernardo bows himself and kisses the lowest altar-step before he answers: "Though I wait here all my life, yet am I not idle; for still I strive and wrestle."

"How?" says the tempting voice.

"With thee!"

CHAPTER V.

THE PENITENT

I

ALL through the winter months Bernardo had not ceased to follow Orlando's movements by means of the newspapers which Vittoria sent him. From Switzerland, together with *la* Simonetti, Berardesca had passed through Germany—Vienna, Frankfort, Dresden, Leipsic, to St. Petersburg—a veritable triumphal progress. Gifts, honours, flowers had been showered upon the pair amid thunders of enthusiastic crowds and adulation of critics. Bernardo read the notices, and returned them to Vittoria without comment; he was waiting for the opportunity that he knew would come at last.

Early in February the singers returned to Rome, where their engagement for a series of operas was advertised. Upon this, Bernardo wrote to Orlando a few brief lines, voicing the old love that only had grown deeper with the knowledge of Orlando's greater need, and enclosing with the latter a tiny medal of St. Francis as a talisman or token, such as in earlier years he used to send. For Orlando, in the days of his first public performances, or before the opening night of any new engagement, was wont, with a half-affected touch of superstition, to beg from his friend or from

Vittoria some trifle to wear on his stage clothes for encouragement and good luck. For nearly a month, Bernardo received no answer to this letter, but he continued to pray for Orlando and to think of him with confidence and hope.

One morning during the first days of March, he was sitting wrapt in thought beside the long green path leading from the convent buildings to a tiny chapel that stands at the extreme edge of the wood. The first rays of the sun, approaching its meridian, were striking over the shoulder of the mountain into the glade, when, looking up, he caught sight of a well-known figure approaching him. With a thrill of joy, but scarcely startled, Bernardo rose to his feet, his arms outstretched in welcome. He marked the misery depicted on his face, the unwonted pallor, the lips half-parted in a wistful hesitation, the eyes upraised in a beseeching wonder, as Orlando approached within a few paces, looked him in the face and suddenly stopped short. Bernardo stepped forward quickly, put his arms round his old friend's neck and kissed him.

He felt a shiver like a sob pass through Orlando's strong frame, he heard him whisper: "Oh, my God, oh, my God, what have I done?" and, taking him by the hand, he led him to the seat, where they sat down together in silence.

Above them a blackcap warbled in the flicker of the ilex, on the bank beside the green path lizards rustled among the dead leaves, in the distance sounded a faint splash and chink — Pacifico drawing water at the court-yard well. Orlando sat with his elbows on his

knees and his head between his hands; Bernardo stared at the dim blue valley and thanked God in his heart.


"I have done with it all, Anselmo, I have done with it all!" Orlando whispered at last. "I have come to you to straighten out my life. I only read your letter yesterday. I had been afraid to read it before; when it came I just threw it aside unopened. Yesterday was the last night of the Roman engagement, the last time perhaps that I shall ever sing upon the stage. I had been for many weeks in an irritable, restless mood, sick of the noise and the adulation, feeling that I had gained all I ever wanted and that I was utterly weary and disillusioned.

"We were singing, 'Tristram and Isolde,' and the unutterable tragedy seemed to have eaten into my soul. I know I sang it well — better than I had ever sung anything before, perhaps — for, in that sombre story I realised my own life — the despair of that death-bringing passion. I knew that I too was steeped in hopeless, sensual mire, which something in my nature loathed with a loathing that I could only drown by plunging deeper. Oh, Anselmo, if you and Vittoria had never crossed my path and drawn me away from my natural sphere, surely I might have been content with the triumphs that I have won in these last months! But you have made in me another being and I am torn between two worlds. Oh, my friend, you who have always been constantly faithful to one spiritual ideal, can have no conception of this frightful state of vacillation. Besides this, more and more as I brooded over this melancholy opera, I became haunted by the face of the other Iseult, Iseult of the

White Hands, the pure, the good, whose love Tristram had scorned, whose life Tristram had wrecked! My God, Anselmo, to think that it needed an opera to make me realise this!

"Well, after the music and the din of the shouting was over, I was turning out drawers in my dressing-room, sorting papers for my servant to pack or destroy. Among them I came upon your letter, still unopened. I held it in my hands for a minute, longing to read it and yet afraid of the reproaches I deserved. I stared at it for a while and then brutally tore it across. Oh, Anselmo, to think that it should have come to this, that I should tear up a letter of yours unread! But as I did so, there fell out your little medal; for a moment I was puzzled; then the truth flashed on me, that it was a 'token' for me to wear on the first night of my Roman season!

"All the old memories of our friendship rushed back together, with the thought of all the other tokens of yours that I had worn and treasured, of all the good fortune and encouragement that they had brought me in the days when I was nervous before I went on to sing, of all that they meant to me years ago! I was wild with remorse. I pieced together your letter; your letter! I can't tell you how it touched me, I can't tell you what I felt; it was as though I were awaking from a dream. When they came to call me to the supper which had been prepared in order to celebrate the close of our Roman season, I locked the door; they beat on it and said I must come; she came, Clelia, but I sent her away too. Afterwards I rushed out without answering



anyone, and meeting on the kerbstone a miserable reporter who was waiting for me in the interests of his rag, I swept him out of my path so roughly that he reeled into the gutter. Then I ran down the Via Nazionale like a madman, and on and on I knew not whither. I remember passing by the Colosseum, the baths of Caracalla, the St. Sebastian Gate and so out into the Campagna. Among the tombs of the Via Appia, I vowed that I would sing no more on the stage, but would be free from it all, the noise, the rush and hurry of the life of these last years, all the braying of the newspapers, the flattery, the flowers, the sycophants, the society ladies who want to advertise themselves by patronising me, the congratulations, telegrams, and the sickening effusions of love-sick women — bah! how I loathe it all!

“It was in disgust of all this that I first was drawn to her, to Clelia. You see, Anselmo, Vittoria was so far away out of it. But Clelia lived in the same whirl as I, and like myself had built herself an inner temple of refuge in the music and that ideal of art so infinitely hard to attain, which so few understood except she and I. Just as you and Vittoria helped me to get over the first obstacles, to convince others that I could sing, so she, when all the world applauded, held up a higher standard of art, and helped me continually to climb to something just beyond, which no one else appreciated. All the time we were on the stage together, she would encourage me with her eyes, giving me directions and criticising, until everyone’s opinion became indifferent to me except hers. That is how it all began between us; almost uncon-

sciously this became transformed into something else. With every note I sang she was bound up; her voice, her eyes, her touch — but what's the good of thinking of all this? Now I have done with it all!

"I cannot go on living as I have lived lately; I am killing myself by this perpetual struggle, which I can only drown in fits of blind despairing passion. Like Tannhäuser, I love two women, each the centre of a different world; with Clelia, music, colour, excitement, and with Vittoria, great clear thoughts, and a deeper, purer love, which draws me by my mind and soul. But when I asked Vittoria before to flee away with me from that other fiercer influence, she refused; how much more will she spurn me now! I have forfeited her love and respect, I am utterly degraded in her eyes. And yet with her alone is all my hope of life and peace!"

II

It was already nearly noon. The sun was pouring warmly through the burgeoning branches and glinting on the tiny yellow crocuses that starred the grassy path.

"You must share our meagre dinner in the refectory," said Bernardo, smiling. "Tell me, how did you come here from the Campagna?"

"I walked as far as the tomb of Cecilia Metella on the Appian Way, and then struck across the country to the Frascati road and re-entered the city by the Lateran. The moon set as I was crossing the fields, and in the darkness I stumbled into ruts and ditches.


My God, how dark it was! But I was desperate and cared for nothing! When I reached the city I wouldn't go back to my rooms to find angry notes from Clelia. I decided to come straight to you and to put the whole of my life into your hands. I walked to the railway station, cleaned my clothes as best I could, telephoned to my servant, and took the first train soon after four o'clock. You will have to lend me everything. I am entirely without luggage."

"Lend you everything? It is true that I have a second habit, in spite of Holy Poverty."

Bernardo's quiet happiness was irresistible; notwithstanding his misery, Orlando smiled.

Being Lent, there was only dry black bread, country cheese, and a salad of spinach for dinner; but Pacifico cooked two eggs in oil and supplied a little thin white wine and coffee of burnt beans and barley. With the sleeves of his habit rolled up to the elbow, he stood in the kitchen doorway polishing plates with a torn wet cloth until the others had finished eating. Fidelis was nervous and abashed by this fine stranger. Orlando ate in gloomy silence what was put before him, Bernardo watching him.

The meal ended, the friars entered the chapel to say their Office. Orlando waited in the garden, striding up and down the long green paths and wrestling with a fit of desperation. He had immense trust in Bernardo while he was with him, but he was disappointed that he had said so little, had given him no counsel, and no hope. He had allowed him to pour out his story without comment, as though he were




unaware of the struggle that was still raging in his mind.

When at length Bernardo joined him, Berardesca looked almost savage in his misery. "Help me, Anselmo!" he burst out passionately, "for if you do not do something I must go back. I begin to long for her, to feel that I have acted like a fool in leaving all that most men would count happiness — my art, fame, wealth and the beautiful woman who is my mistress. I can't understand myself, or what it was in your letter that induced me to act as I have done. But there it is! Your influence in the past engrafted, as it were, a new soul upon my being, and by that you hold me; by the re-awakening of that within me you have caused me to despair and drawn me here. I could not put my life into the hands of any other man; but you I have loved so, and besides being a priest, I feel you are a saint — yes, there is something in you that compels me in a way that I do not understand. If it were not for that I would go back now, run away from this folly to that other folly — the life that I know is killing me, body and soul! But if I am not to go, you must think for me, and tell me what to do."

Bernardo put his hands upon Orlando's shoulders. "Very well," he said quietly, "I will do what you ask on one condition; that you promise now to obey me implicitly; of course, I will not ask you to do anything directly affecting anyone else."

Orlando started. "What do you mean? Do you wish me to resign my will?" he asked defiantly.

"Only for to-day. At sunset you will be free."



"You seem to treat me like a child," answered Orlando coldly. "But I will promise, since you wish it; though I do not see what good such a thing can do."

In silence Bernardo led the way from the sunlit garden through the dark narrow passages until they stood together in the tiny twilighted choir lined with ancient wooden desks and stalls. Smiling strangely, the friar asked Orlando to sit down in one of the worm-eaten seats and placed before him a large quarto psalter open at the first psalm.

"We will read the verses alternately," he said, standing before the lofty lectern in the centre of the choir. "We will repeat the glorias in the same manner, whosoever turn it may chance to be." In a steady, clear voice he began to read.

Orlando's lips curled with impatience and contempt. Surely Anselmo did not think that it would do him any good in his present mood to read a few Latin psalms? Nevertheless, as he had given his word, he read out the verses which came to his turn, as clearly as he could, considering that he was not accustomed to such exercises.

Every now and then he realised the sonorous and imaginative beauty of the phrases; at other times he glanced up at the friar, wondering what could be the object of this seemingly futile proceeding and how long this part of their service was going to last. Who could have imagined that Anselmo and he should ever pass the time in doing anything so strange as this? Evidently his friend had no idea, he thought, how little the Christian services signified to him.

When they had read five or six psalms he began to grow restive. The exercise was becoming very tedious. But there was nothing to be seen in Bernardo's face beyond a quiet assurance and content. His voice lilted on softly through the beautiful rhythms, until for a short while Orlando almost enjoyed this tossing of the verses backwards and forwards, as though they were playing a game at ball. He was getting into practice; he became almost complacent at the comparative ease with which he was beginning to pronounce the glorious old language. It occurred to him that he ought to read it more frequently, just for the beauty of the poetry. Then he thought how far away he was from the world; yesterday at this time he was driving through the streets of Rome with Clelia, saluted and complimented everywhere when they were recognised by the passing crowd. What a long while ago that seemed!


At the end of the fourteenth psalm his lips were very dry. It fell to him to begin the fifteenth: "*Domine, quis habitabit?*" Instead of beginning it, he exclaimed impatiently: "What is the good of all this? I am getting tired."

For all answer, Bernardo looked at him with a smile of encouragement and took up the opening verse himself. Thus they continued for three more psalms and then, noticing that Orlando was beginning to clip and mispronounce the syllables from fatigue, the friar, reading as he went, walked into the sacristy and came back with a carafe of water and a glass which he put down beside the other's desk. Orlando drank a little and went on.

During the long psalm, "*Deus, Deus meus,*" he

began to realise that there was something like a contest taking place between him and this pale friar standing over against him. He supposed that this was a sort of penance which the priest in Anselmo had thought it necessary to impose. But even if they read the whole psalter, at least he would be free at sunset. Glancing stealthily at his watch he saw that they had only been reading for little over an hour, though it had seemed to him much longer, and that there would be nearly four more hours of daylight. He ground his teeth with irritation at the thought of how he had been made to promise obedience for such a purpose. He felt waves of proud rebellion at the idea that he, one of Europe's greatest singers, should be thus deliberately tortured and humiliated. He had impulses to break his word, to leave the chapel, but the thought of having to face his misery once more alone controlled him.

At the end of the second hour, the strain at times became almost intolerable — the utter monotony, the apparent futility, the heavy Latin syllables that tired his lips and tongue, the treadmill of the alternate verses which scarcely allowed him to lift his eyes from the time-stained, thumb-marked pages with their large, old-fashioned type, in order to glance across the tiny room at the pale face of this tall, ascetic friar, whom he knew so well and yet understood so little. It seemed positively mean and cruel, that such advantage had been taken of his promise. Yet when he looked at the gentle eyes of his friend, he realised that the strain for him was probably little less acute, seeing that, although he had the habit of reading Latin aloud, he had not half his own physical strength,



and moreover he had placed himself at a disadvantage by standing. How frail and tired he looked! Then once more these thoughts died away in a kind of dazed fatigue and resignation, the task becoming easier and more mechanical.

At the end of the third hour, albeit very weary, Orlando felt his mind invaded by a strange sensation of peace, such as he had never known before. It hardly seemed to be he himself who read; his real being appeared to be floating somewhere quite apart from this ghostly building. It was as though he were being beaten insensible by a succession of unearthly blows. He had known a similar feeling as a boy after he had been running a long race of many miles and had lost sense of his surroundings from exhaustion. Moreover a sort of exaltation was stealing over him; he was drifting into the spirit of these psalms. How utterly remote they were from the noisy trifles that had concerned him hitherto! There seemed no reason why he should not go on reading the praises of God like this for all eternity. They did not move him now by quick flashes of poetic beauty; but were like the revolving stars, the seasons, the hills, the sea, all things that praised God in perpetual service. "*Dominus regnavit, exultet terra; latentur insulæ multæ. . . . Nubes et caligo in circuito ejus . . . ignis ante ipsum præcedit. . . . Iluxerunt fulgura. . . . Montes sicut cera . . . a facie Domini, a facie Domini omnis terra.*"

He began to be tossed and swayed in some current of everlasting praise; he had forgotten himself and his difficulty of reading; the words flowed glibly and unconsciously; he was almost hypnotised into seeing

the vision of some world that he felt close beside him and yet whose existence he had never suspected before. He seemed to be one with the stars, seas, hills, with all men who devoted their lives to God's praise and with innumerable hosts of sentient beings in the heavens and the earth, the waves, the clouds, the flowers and forests, in the innumerable atoms dancing in every particle of the material universe and fulfilling their part of an infinite concord of thanksgiving. He became dimly aware of Powers and Dominions around him, making all his ambitions and his passions mean and vile. During the psalms of penitence he realised his own abject unworthiness and yet that this too was an insignificant trifle in all this immensity of praise.

"Amictus lumine sictu vestimento, extendes cælum sicut pellem. . . . Qui tegis aquis superiora ejus . . . qui ponis nubem ascensum tuum, qui ambulas super pennas ventorum. . . . Qui facis angelos tuos spiritus; ministros tuos ignem urentem . . . abyssus . . . montes. . . . aquæ . . . volucres . . . luna . . . sol . . . tenebræ . . . nesc. . . ."

At the beginning of the fifth hour Orlando grew so weary that his lips would scarcely frame the syllables as he stumbled along through the verses. Time after time he tried to pull himself together with the determination that he would not give in. But now it was growing dark in the little chapel, so that there was added the new difficulty of following the old type. More and more frequently Bernardo prompted him, until at last the friar began to take whole verses from his lips and finally to read alone. The victory in this strange symbolical contest was entirely with him. For a short while longer Orlando joined in at the

glorias, then suddenly with a sort of sob he fell asleep.

When he awoke, Bernardo was kneeling in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. The red lamp showed that, in spite of the chill, his brow was damp with perspiration.

"The sun has already set, you are free," he whispered, smiling gently. Then he led the way in silence through the corridor and along the dim path to the open space before the lonely shrine, whence they looked out over the immensity of purple plain and violet hill to where, beyond Perugia, the dying embers of the sunken day cast a dull red glare upwards amid ash-grey clouds.

"Oh, Anselmo, Anselmo!" whispered Orlando; "What have you done to me?"

III

In the small parish church of Le Viole — a scattered hamlet situated on the road between Assisi and Foligno where the avalanche of stone from the dry Carceri gorge pours itself out between the olives — the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in its golden monstrance upon the altar, surrounded by many lighted tapers. All the old women of the village were "watching," seated, rosary in hand, on the dark wooden benches that are set before the sanctuary or ranged between the confessional-boxes against the gaudily painted walks. Most of them sat so motionless and so huddled up in shawls that were it not for the slipping of the chaplet beads through their withered, knotted fingers, or the occasional nod of a grey head over the brink of slumber, the figures might have been

taken for inanimate bundles of old clothes, laid here in the church to be out of the world's way. Seated among them were a few old men, past work, whose only movements were when one or other leaned forward a little and spat on the floor from behind a palsied hand, as though almost ashamed to do so in the Presence of the Lord.

Every now and then a girl with a bright scarf thrown over her hair would creep in from the sunlight, genuflect on both knees, bowing the head, kneel in a vacant place for a few minutes, genuflect once more and steal away. At other times a band of children would clatter in noisily, letting the door fall to with a thud that echoed through the silent building, stretch up to the stoup on tiptoe, cross themselves, patter a little way along the nave, bob to the shining altar, whisper and stare about shyly, and suddenly scuttle out. Or a family would be piloted round by a small elder sister who murmured admonitions to the tiny ones, paying her own devotions with a distracted and self-conscious air. But these were only transient episodes in the long watch of the old people; when the door closed after each brief interruption, for endless periods the hush would be unbroken except by their heavy breathing and faint distant sounds outside. There was something infinitely reposeful about this silent session in the Presence-chamber; it seemed a fitting way of passing the hours for those whose only life henceforth was just to wait for death.

As the evening drew on towards the hour of Benediction, the church filled slowly with others who had done their work. Middle-aged women left their kitchens or their sewing; the irruptions of eager chil-

dren grew more frequent. The wheezing and banging of the opening and closing door became incessant; peasants from the farms around trooped in with heavy boots, donned for the purpose. Among them came a tall lady dressed in black, who had driven in a carriage from Assisi; she found a quiet place to kneel by the steps of a side-altar. At length, when the bell rang from the campanile and the sacristans moved round the church lighting additional tapers in high sconces and large hanging candelabra, Bernardo, followed by Orlando, entered, threading his way through the crowd towards the altar rails.

Orlando had been living five days at the Carceri, cooking his own food with Pacifico in the little kitchen, drawing his own water from the well, and helping Amedeo in the garden. He had suggested making several new paths through the wilderness of brushwood, had cleared and levelled them, marking their borders with lines of stones and planting bulbs and roots of wild flowers in the banks around. He had written many letters, cancelling engagements and telling his friends that he was going off on a long holiday, he knew not where. Finally he had broken off his connections with Clelia Simonetti, steeling his heart with the thought that his place by her side would probably not long be empty.

Meanwhile Bernardo had written to Vittoria, who was staying in a convent at Florence: "He is here at the Carceri with me," he had said, "having given up his career and all that kept him away from you. He longs with *all* his heart to beg you to do that which before he asked with but *half* his heart and which

you could not grant him then. Cannot you do so now?

"I may not speak to you, for the prohibition has not yet been removed, but I would that I could see you with him once more united in the Presence of our Blessed Lord.

"On the feast of St. Joseph there is to be an Exposition at the little Church of Le Viole, a village just below us. I shall take him there for Benediction about five o'clock. May Christ guide you in this, as in all else!"

When the priests were standing at the altar and the singing of the "*O Salutaris*" had begun, the black-robed lady, rising from her corner, moved forwards between the peasants, who marvelled at the radiant beauty of her face. While the Litany of Blessed Virgin swelled, wave upon wave of invocation she drew yet nearer to the friar, who looked round, caught her eye and beckoned silently. At the "*Tantum Ergo*" she knelt down near him, and the three remained thus side by side until the Benediction with the Sacrament was given. But when the ringing of the small bell ceased and the bowed heads were raised, the friar swiftly and silently withdrew amid the crowd.

Looking back a moment later, he saw Orlando glancing round for him, start suddenly and after a second's pause eagerly clasp in his own the folded hands of the kneeling woman; but he could not see Vittoria's look except reflected in her husband's face. Then he hurried away from the church and, praising God, climbed by the narrow stony paths to the lonely darkening mountain.

CHAPTER VI

THE FAREWELL

I

THE weeks and months went by, until the song of the birds in the dawn made happy Fidelis' heart; the days grew milder and longer; the tattered patches of the snow-drifts in the wood and the gorge gradually melted away. Long before the last white remnants vanished the pageant of the wild flowers had begun. First under the trees the ground was starred with snowdrops, while the crocuses streaked the broad green paths with purple, white and gold. Before they faded came the violets, which lasted far into the spring, to be succeeded by the crowfoot, hepatica, anemone and cyclamen, by which time the last rags of the snow had disappeared.

To the cold bright days of February succeeded the warmer winds and rains of March, when at length the small brown oaks on the hillsides shed their withered leaves. Corn peeped up in the fields, and over the plain and the distant hills spring's green and azure gained on winter's brown and purple. The fruit trees blossomed round the farms, resembling from the distance little puffs of still white smoke amid the smouldering olive-greys.

To Bernardo the natural loveliness of earth was as

a myriad-tinted window, which in former years had glimmered dimly, but now was pierced by a noonday sun of dazzling radiance, till it shone in a jewelled blaze of revelation. He loved the wild creatures as deeply as Fidelis, but with difference. He loved them as the visible manifestations of Love. All nature was a sacrament, the returning spring was but one aspect of God's felicity. He was a lover who is in love with Love; Fidelis loved each creature for its own sake. The two men scarcely spoke; words seemed to be but as opaque patches upon their crystal understanding. When they met as they walked along the woodland paths, they smiled into each other's eyes and passed on without greeting. Their sympathy was so complete that they were hardly aware of one another.

Bernardo's consciousness seemed to float like a sea-bird upon an ocean of Love, on the sunlit surface of which no thought of doubt or fear could rest, but sank immediately and disappeared. He experienced the celestial gaiety of those early brothers of the Order who for sheer joy would burst into laughter as they said the Office. He was troubled no more by problems, but was "like the saints in Heaven that will sight nought but God's will and are well-pleased both with hiding and with shewing."

Then suddenly one April evening came the summons, calling him immediately to Rome. The message was delivered to him through the Guardian of San Damiano, who added that he would be sent abroad upon a mission. He was to spend the next day and night in his old convent.

In the dawn he put together his few possessions, a spare habit with a handful of books of devotion, and said good-bye. Pacifico treasured almost as relics the little wooden cross Bernardo gave him and a scrap of his writing, stolen from his cell. Fidelis had relapsed from his spring brightness into his winter taciturnity. "Come!" said Bernardo, as he embraced him, "I am leaving you with many small consolers."

"What?" said Fidelis, looking up bewildered.

Bernardo pointed towards the convent roof and lo, the air was filled with wheeling birds. The swallows had arrived that very morning, but Fidelis in his grief had never noticed them.

II

Thus it happened that Bernardo passed his last night at Assisi in his old cell and sitting in the same chair looked forth into the moonlight.

Once more the ray slipped across the table striking his clasped hands; once more he reviewed his life, feeling how patient God had been with him; for now the whole progress appeared to him to have been one of spiritual constraint.

One by one the dividing veils had been pierced and torn; one by one the outer husks had been winnowed away:—first the worldly hopes of ambition and success, that he had laid aside eight years ago; then the shrouds of religious convention, the intellectual tradition, rent by the re-awakening of his earlier self at Orlando's visit to him. The period of

misery and sterility had withered all that could intervene between his own will and the Divine control. Thenceforward Love Himself had led him from the death and darkness and opened to him the Gardens of the King.

Now he was going to Rome to be sent away on a mission, perhaps to the end of the earth. The one thing that he asked was that he should find strife, danger, persecution, hardship, sickness, pain. He longed to have scope for suffering and sacrifice, to labour for the saving of souls, to lay down his life for the Cross. Would he be sent to some crowded slum of Italian immigrants in a vast American city, or to some lonely station amid the Pampas or distant ranches of the Argentine? He was scarcely curious to know; he was only an instrument in the hand of his Master; his sole desire was for service.

His soul could be moved only by that which accorded with its inward harmony — the joy and beauty of creation, the lovelier aspects of humanity. For the suffering of others he had the fuller compassion since he was freed from doubt or dread; for their sin he had a tenderer mercy. Nothing could break the inward peace in which his soul reposed; nothing divert the living stream of faith, power and love; he could never be friendless, deserted or alone. He was above the reach of circumstance; his peace admitted neither hope nor fear; henceforth his life could have no history.

III

He slept like a child and wakened to his last day in Assisi with a soft regret that was but a single bitter drop in a cup of gratitude and hope. He blessed the beauty of the place, the dearness of the little convent and the goodness of the men with whom he had lived so long. Every detail of the day had a message for him; every familiar object spoke to him as a friend. He felt he could never have loved any home in the world like this.

The others clustered round him, half-consciously treating him with affectionate reverence. Whatever criticism had before existed was entirely forgotten. Tomaso had been the first to welcome him back with both hands outstretched and a genial solicitude for his health after the hardships of a winter at the Carceri. Bernardo felt that there was in him a paternal kindness and good sense, to which he had been blind. Filippo had never been conscious of hostility, but had only exaggerated the significance of every episode without considering or remembering his feelings. The Guardian looked at Bernardo gravely, laying his hands on his shoulders with quiet satisfaction. Patrizio could hardly take his eyes from him. The novices and students were secretly jealous of the one of their number who served Bernardo when he said his Mass.

Only Domenico held back; he was too honest to pass over his old hostility with the easy forgetfulness of Tomaso and Filippo. He knew that he had been mistaken, but he did not know how to acknowledge

his error. He avoided Bernardo's glance and dreaded the time when he would have to say good-bye.

After Vespers, the others went out into the garden to say a few last words and add a few last wishes. Bernardo waited for Domenico who had remained behind in the chapel, and, seeing him at the door, had tried to elude him by going out another way and stealing up to his cell alone. But Bernardo forestalled him and met him face to face in the doorway leading from the cloisters. Domenico dropped his eyes: "Excuse me!" he said in a low voice. "No," answered Bernardo. Domenico fell upon his neck.

Girolamo wept at parting with one whom he loved as a son. He wanted to possess something that belonged to him, but Bernardo had nothing to give. Finally they exchanged their cords.

As Bernardo passed for the last time through the city gate, Linda Amori hobbled out of her house on crutches. In another month she would be able to walk without them. Bernardo took her with him to the children's school, and left her to the consolation of the sisters.

On that spring afternoon everyone seemed to be walking in the streets or standing at their doors and windows, and everyone who knew Bernardo came to salute him and to ask where he was going. One or two of them walked with him; several kissed his hand, begging his prayers; still more nodded, smiled or took off their hats to him. He had never known before that he had so many friends.

But the last farewell remained until he passed out of the gate of San Francesco, and gazed for the last

time on the beloved land. Under a changeful turquoise sky, heavy with rolling cumulus to the east and streaked with cirrous wrack towards the western sun, the amethyst and emerald plain was shot with a thousand gleams and shadows — shafts of light that revealed far off some gleaming hill-set city, nimbed, as it were, by an unearthly radiance, shades that eclipsed in purple veil all but the billowing horizon. One of the rays struck the fair pyramid of Trevi, rebuilding it of ivory and gold, while over far Spoleto drooped a dim curtain of deep violet gloom. Beyond the spur of Montefalco one azure mountain group stood clear above the shadowy undulating highlands that shut in the south as far as the isolated hillock with the towers of Torgiano, where range after range arose in sunlight to the crowning snow-capped peak of Amiata. To the west, Perugia on her mountain throne lifted her slender belfries to the sky with three blue peaks that fell away towards the north. Before Bernardo from the varied plain arose the great dome of the Angels, to his right the shingly river-bed wound among vines and poplars; while over all this wealth of detailed loveliness shimmered a diaphanous veil of clear still air, pierced with alternate fall of strong rich sunlight and blue shadow, a moving and transfusing presence that harmonised the myriad-tinted whole.

The friar looked back at the gold-brown city with its towered gates and campanili, and on a loving impulse raised his hand to bless it. But suddenly he recalled Another's benediction, and humbly turning with bowed head, walked swiftly down the hill.

24
175 m



